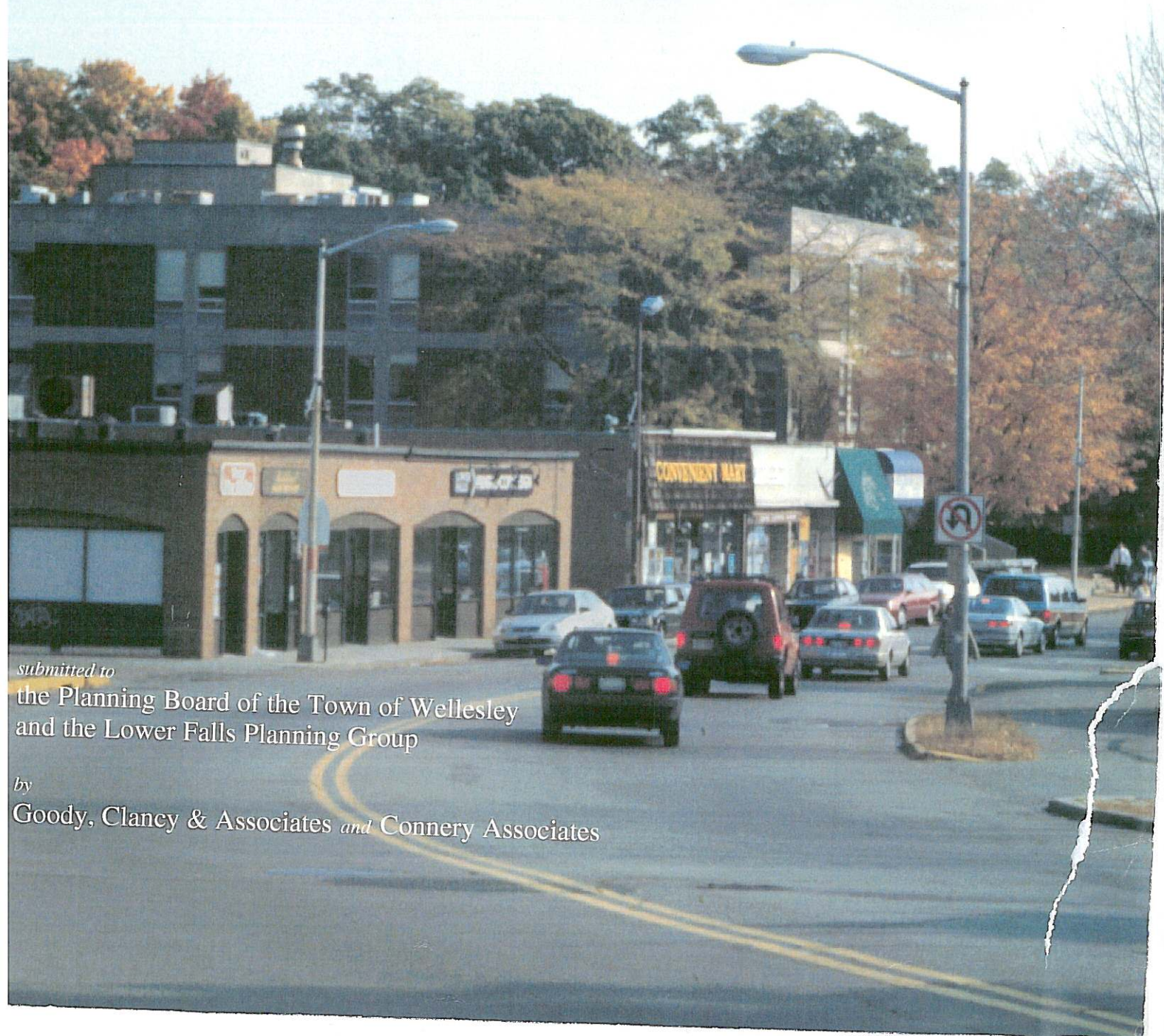


# Wellesley Lower Falls

## ZONING, URBAN DESIGN AND LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES



*submitted to*  
the Planning Board of the Town of Wellesley  
and the Lower Falls Planning Group

*by*  
Goody, Clancy & Associates and Connery Associates



# Wellesley Lower Falls

## Zoning, Urban Design and Landscape Guidelines

### *Table of Contents*

Executive Summary.....	3
Introduction.....	7
I. Public Process.....	9
II. Wellesley Lower Falls : A Brief History.....	11
III. Existing Conditions.....	15
IV. Community Goals.....	23
V. Zoning for the Future.....	25
A. Lower Falls Commercial (LFC) Zoning District.....	27
B. Residential Incentive Overlay (RIO) District.....	30
VI. Urban Design and Landscape Guidelines.....	33
A. Public Environment.....	34
Lighting	
Pedestrian Connections	
Landscaping	
Street Furniture	
Public Open Space	
Parking	
B. Private Environment.....	41
1. Buildings and Facades.....	41
Site Planning, Landscaping and Parking Areas	
Building Height	
Composition of the Building Facade	
Special Treatment of the First Floor	
Materials and Colors	
Renovation and Restoration	
Backs of Buildings and Alleys	

2. Storefronts.....	52
Storefront Frame	
Storefront Display Area	
Window Display	
Awnings	
Air Conditioners	
Storefront Materials	
Color	
Lighting	
3. Signage.....	56
Wall Signs	
Window Signs	
Projecting Signs	
Materials	
Colors	
Lighting	
4. Maintenance.....	62
VII. Planning Proposals.....	65
A. Town Green	
B. Right-of-Way and Mica Lane Options	
C. Assisted Living Housing Options	
D. Municipal Parking Garage Options	

#### Appendix : Text of Zoning Amendments

## Executive Summary

The resolve to plan the future of Lower Falls is the result of a working partnership among its residents, its business community and Wellesley town government. Working together, these stakeholders developed five main goals for Lower Falls: maintain and enhance Lower Falls' village character; improve its appearance with attractive storefronts and landscaping; improve traffic and parking conditions; enhance access to the Charles River; and strengthen Lower Falls as the eastern gateway into Wellesley. Charged with addressing these issues, the consultant team of Goody, Clancy & Associates and Connery Associates analyzed the site, solicited public input through presentations and discussion groups, and produced the enclosed proposed zoning amendments, urban design and landscape guidelines for the public and private realms, and possible futures for key components of Lower Falls.

### Summary of Findings

Wellesley Lower Falls is distinguished in its opportunities and challenges. Its unique identity arises from location, history and physical character. At the crossroads of a metropolitan roadway system, Lower Falls has reaped the economic benefits and traffic burdens of a regional location while struggling to maintain the functions and small-scale character of a village center. The architecture of the center is diverse, offering a pleasant visual variety to preserve in future redevelopment. Many of the buildings are built close to the sidewalk, forming blocks of a consistent street edge along a curving Washington Street. A strong opportunity arises from Lower Falls' close proximity to the Charles River. Harnessing the river's water power early gave rise to an industrial economy. Today, buildings along Washington and Walnut Streets turn their back to the river. If a path system was created to provide access to and along the river, and if future land uses were developed to take advantage of the water's edge and linear parks, the Charles River would once again define the central attraction of Lower Falls in a post-industrial economy.

Lower Falls faces several challenges as well. While many of the buildings contribute to the fine-grain character of the village center, others are large and set back from the street, breaking up the continuous sense of enclosure that marks appealing small commercial districts. Under existing zoning, with a maximum FAR of .3 and an off-street parking requirement of 3.2 spaces per 1,000 square feet of building area, the center is built to capacity and small properties cannot redevelop. High traffic volumes, numerous curb cuts and poor road design have created safety problems and exacerbated congestion. The center's environment is unfriendly to pedestrians: barren sidewalks, uninviting storefronts and auto-oriented uses add to the difficulty of crossing busy streets, reducing business vitality and quality of life. Finally, Lower Falls is underserved in its parking supply, which further contributes to the loss of pedestrians supporting the small retail activities of the center and enlivening its streets.

The zoning recommendations, urban design and landscape guidelines, and specific planning proposals in this report are tailored to address these opportunities and challenges. Lower Falls has the potential to become a vibrant, pedestrian-oriented commercial center surrounded and supported by landscaped office parks, serene residential neighborhoods and a continuous network of trails, bike paths and riverfront parkland. The goal of these recommendations is to help Lower Falls to realize its potential and fulfill the community's vision of its future.

### Summary of Zoning Recommendations

Current zoning constricts Lower Falls. Because of the .3 FAR and 3.2 parking requirement, buildings on small sites cannot grow. This makes it likely that future development in Lower Falls will be dominated by the consolidation of small properties into large parcels, with larger buildings set back from the street, further eroding the character and street edge of Lower Falls. The range of uses currently allowed by right – retail uses up to 50,000 square feet, gas stations, auto-repair facilities, printing plants – and others allowed by special



permit – car wash, autobody paint shop, sale of trailers and boats – is unlikely to promote the village character envisioned by the Lower Falls community. To address these conditions, and to shape Lower Falls over the long-term, two zoning changes are proposed. A new zoning district, called Lower Falls Commercial, consolidates several business districts along Washington Street, while a Residential Incentive Overlay District applies to commercial and industrial parcels between Washington Street and the Charles River.

The Lower Falls Commercial (LFC) Zoning District is tailored to encourage the development of a pedestrian-friendly, small-scale commercial center, while protecting the character and quality of life of immediately adjacent residential neighborhoods. LFC limits the uses permitted by right to retail stores of 10,000 square feet or less, restaurants and outdoor cafes, offices, public buildings, and housing, among others. Retail stores larger than 10,000 square feet, drive-through facilities, dry-cleaning stores, and gas stations would require a special permit. The FAR remains at .3 by right, but in order to support reinvestment in commercial properties, the FAR can be raised to 1.00 by special permit. Height is limited to 2 stories or 36 feet to maintain the smaller scale of buildings in Lower Falls. The off-street parking requirement remains at 3.2 spaces per 1,000 square feet of building area, but drops to 2.5 spaces if any portion of the parcel is within 500' of a public parking area containing at least 50 spaces. In addition, to encourage the building of upper stories, the first 4,000 square feet of upper story is exempt from parking requirements. Finally, to maintain a more consistent street edge and to allow for streetscape improvements, front yard setbacks are to be no less than 5 feet, and no more than 10 feet. The intention is to maintain and enhance the fine-grain commercial character of Lower Falls, while protecting the neighborhood as a whole from the intrusive impacts of large-scale office and retail development.

The Residential Incentive Overlay (RIO) District is a longer term strategy intended to provide positive incentives for residential redevelopment of commercial and industrial properties, should their operation become less financially competitive due to access constraints or changing market conditions. The RIO confers additional development rights to sites of at least two acres, or existing buildings with at least 25,000 square feet of space, for redevelopment into assisted elderly living, independent elderly housing, or conventional multi-family housing. The RIO is intended to complement the village character of Lower Falls by adding a resident population to support local businesses, and taking better advantage of the proximity of the Charles River, Lower Falls' greatest natural asset.

### **Summary of Urban Design and Landscape Guidelines**

The Urban Design and Landscape Guidelines provide a common direction for future improvements to both the public and private environments in Lower Falls. They reflect agreement within the community that the attractiveness of the commercial center is important to the Town as a whole, and essential to enhancing the district's village character.

Given the diversity of Lower Falls' private environment, the public environment bears the responsibility of providing a clear structure for the center through the design of streets, sidewalks, and open spaces. Such a unifying framework allows individual properties of Lower Falls' architecture to spring into relief without disintegrating into chaos. Guidelines for the public environment cover lighting, pedestrian connections, landscaping, street furniture, public open spaces and parking.

Guidelines for the private environment are intended to help business and property owners in their ongoing maintenance and capital investments to improve the appearance of their building and increase the market appeal of their business. Thus the guidelines range wider than those for the public environment. Buildings and Facades, the first section, contains recommendations about site planning, composition of building facades, materials and colors, and how to treat the backs of buildings, among other topics. The second section, Storefronts, includes recommendations for the storefront frame, window display, awnings, materials and color. The third section, Signage, introduces the forms, materials, colors, and lighting for signs, and the final section,



Maintenance, contains a checklist to help business and building owners evaluate their buildings.

Together, these recommendations ensure the coordination of public and private efforts necessary to realize the urban design potential of Lower Falls.

### **Summary of Planning Proposals**

The final section of this report presents visions of what could happen in the heart of Lower Falls in the future. Included are proposals for a possible town green, improvements in the circulation in the Mica Lane area, potential redevelopment of the land between Washington Street and the Charles River as assisted elderly living, and different options for municipal parking facilities. The common goal of these proposals is to improve the function and attractiveness of Lower Falls, and realize its potential as a vibrant village center.

Lower Falls needs a focal point, a space that draws attention visually and socially. The two proposed options for a Town Green share a common site, the front portion of 27 Washington Street, a location which would be highly visible from both east and west, and easily accessible to both drivers and pedestrians. The only difference between the two proposals is that Option 2 contains a one-story retail building facing onto the Green to help draw pedestrian traffic, provide some continuity with the retail functions of Washington Street, and separate the Green from other uses on the 27 Washington site.

The second set of planning proposals concerns improving circulation and parking along the railroad right-of-way and Mica Lane. The railroad right-of-way, in particular, offers two significant opportunities for improving circulation: providing a foot path and bikeway from Washington Street to the Newton side of the Charles River, and resolving traffic and parking problems associated with the Mica Lane properties. The 43' to 45' width of the right-of-way does not provide enough room to allocate a dedicated bike lane, a dedicated pedestrian path, a separate public way for automobiles, and parking. The two options presented opt to combine the bikepath with the public roadway and to provide parking for the Mica Lane properties, since lack of parking is the most serious obstacle to improving or redeveloping these properties.

The third set of planning proposals presents options for future redevelopment of 27 Washington Street into assisted living housing as proposed in the Residential Incentive Overlay (RIO) District. The possible uses under RIO – assisted living, independent elderly, and conventional multi-family housing developments – all have the benefit of reducing traffic along Washington Street and requiring less parking than large retail and office uses. They also reclaim the Charles with river-oriented uses, while still allowing continuous public access along the river. Lastly, providing housing in the heart of Lower Falls would increase the center's customer base, enliven its public spaces, and help to strengthen its pedestrian-friendly character.

The final set of proposals addresses the pressing need for off-street parking through the development of more municipally-owned parking. The first option would be to increase the capacity of the current municipal lot by adding a lower level and a deck. While the fact that the Town already owns this site is a key advantage, a parking garage would not be the best use of this lot, with its open views of the Charles River, and its location between restaurant and residential uses; it seems far better suited for retail use. Thus the second and third parking proposals are predicated on the idea of a land swap between the Town and private landowners on the south side of Washington Street. The second option proposes a garage on the Campbell property, with a front building of retail and office on continuing the streetwall on Washington Street and screening the garage from view. The last option proposes an identical garage, but on the Haynes property behind Campbell rather than directly on Washington Street.

Together these amendments, guidelines and proposals will help to shape the character of Lower Falls and fulfill its community's vision.





## Introduction

In 1996, the Town of Wellesley issued a Request For Proposals for planning services for the commercial area of Lower Falls. The team of Goody, Clancy & Associates, architects and planners, and Connery Associates, zoning consultants, was selected to develop guidelines for the improvement of the appearance and function of the business district. This report is the result of public meetings as well as of observation, analysis and design. It is offered to the Planning Board of the Town of Wellesley, to the Lower Falls Planning Group, a citizen group formed around the desire to plan the future of this unique commercial area, and to all stakeholders in Lower Falls.

These Zoning Recommendations and Urban Design and Landscape Guidelines have been developed to encourage land uses and physical improvements that contribute to the attractiveness and long-term vitality of Wellesley Lower Falls. The Recommendations and Guidelines are intended to provide a common direction for businesses and Town departments when undertaking improvements. Many of the most attractive and successful commercial areas have been developed through the coordination of public and private initiatives. These Guidelines outline and describe the kind of shared understanding necessary to ensure that public and private improvements work together towards enhancing Lower Falls' character as a village center.





# I. Public Process

## A Partnership Among Residents, the Business Community, and the Town of Wellesley

The guidelines and recommendations contained in this report are the result of a working partnership among the Town government, residents, and the Lower Falls business community.

Beginning with a highly successful Lower Falls Forum in June of 1995, residents and business owners from Lower Falls worked with the Town of Wellesley to plan for the future of the area. This first public forum solicited ideas from the community about the future of Lower Falls. After much discussion in small focus groups, the consensus of the meeting was to develop a plan to achieve five main goals:

- Maintain the existing village character of the Lower Falls commercial district by retaining small shops oriented to neighborhood needs.
- Improve the appearance of the area with attractive storefronts and more landscaping; design any new building at the same scale as existing structures and to blend with historic facades.
- Improve traffic and parking conditions; retain on-street parking, and maintain a slow traffic speed.
- Enhance access to the Charles River, link existing parks and provide bike and walking paths along the river.
- Increase the visual and architectural standard of Lower Falls as a gateway to the rest of Wellesley.

After the Forum, a newly created Lower Falls Planning Group (LFPG) met monthly to work on developing and implementing such a plan. The Town retained the firm of Brown and Rowe, landscape architects and planners, as consultants to the LFPG, to develop alternative designs for the center of Lower falls, in keeping with the goals of the first Public Forum. The LFPG held a second large public meeting, called the Economic Roundtable, in November at the Wellesley Town Hall. A panel of experts offered their comments on the alternative design options, and participants continued the analysis in discussion groups. Their opinions were consistent with the outcome of the first Public Forum. The contents of both meetings, as well as findings from work done for the 1994 Wellesley Comprehensive Plan, are documented in a report entitled *Lower Falls Planning Study* prepared by the LFPG and issued in February 1996.

In late summer 1996, the team of Goody Clancy & Associates and Connery Associates was commissioned by the Town to prepare zoning, urban design, and landscape guidelines for Lower Falls. As part of this work, the consultants held two additional public meetings to continue the public process of soliciting feedback on the planning needs of Lower Falls. The first was a large public forum in October at St. John School to present initial zoning recommendations and discuss emerging components of a plan. The second, in November, was a breakfast meeting with business and property owners of Lower Falls to more specifically address zoning and parking proposals. Throughout this period, the consultant team met periodically with members of the Planning Board and of the Lower Falls Planning Group.

The Zoning, Urban Design and Landscape Guidelines that follow thus reflect agreement within the Lower Falls community as a whole – residents, business and property owners, and town representatives – about their goals for the community and the appropriate means of implementing them.





## II. Wellesley Lower Falls: A Brief History

Lower Falls is one of the three oldest commercial districts of the Town of Wellesley and the most industrial in origin. Nestled in a bend of the Charles River, at the border with the City of Newton, it centers along the east-west Washington Street, which as Route 16 is part of a major regional highway network. Washington Street is the heart of the retail and business district. From the gateway of a bridge, River Street winds south along the banks of the Charles and leads to the office park area of Walnut Street, which heads back north to rejoin Washington Street. The area north of Washington Street and the Walnut Street area, like peninsulas, are surrounded by the River's meandering.

### The Evolution of Lower Falls

The buildings along Washington and Walnut Streets vary in character, reflecting the evolution of Lower Falls from a manufacturing center into a small commercial district and large suburban office park.

*The Formation of the Village.* Lower Falls owes its birth to the Charles River and the water-powered manufacturing of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. As is still visible in buildings such as the Moulton Eaton Mills on Walnut Street and 27 Mica Lane off of Washington Street, Lower Falls was first oriented towards the River. The first business relying on the Falls for power was an iron works founded in 1704, followed shortly by sawmills, grist mills and a paper mill in 1790. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many water-powered industries had located along this stretch of the Charles: silk mills, knitting mills, paper mills, a planing mill, a fulling mill, and a cabinet shop among others. [Elizabeth Hinchcliffe. *Five Pounds of Currency, Three Pounds of Corn*. Massachusetts Historical Society, 1981.] When steam replaced water as a source of energy, the pattern of working mills by the river had been established.

*A view of Lower Falls, at Wellesley and Newton, in 1886.*





Lower Falls has also been a cross-roads village from the beginning. In pre-colonial times, a portage trail followed the general line of Washington Street from below the lower falls to the upper Charles in Natick. The evolving road became an important communication between the market and port of Boston and the towns and villages to the west. In 1696, Benjamin Mills opened a travelers' inn near the falls. The first dam and bridge over the falls were built in 1788 where the present Washington Street bridge stands. River mills used this east-west route to transport raw materials and manufactured goods.

*The Ebb of Manufacturing.* Between the late 1800s and World War II, water- and steam-powered industry faded as the driving force in Lower Falls. Instead, rail transportation became the key to further development. Lower Falls was now the connecting point between Route 16 and the all-important railroad line into Boston. The commuter rail station stood on the current site of 27 Washington Street, while freight and holding yards occupied land behind 16 Washington Street and along River Street. Most of the one and two-story commercial buildings along Washington Street date from this quieter era when the industrial mills were phasing out and the automobile had yet to take over.



*Lower Falls from 27 Washington Street, post-WW II*

*Post-War Development.* Following World War II, the visual character of Lower Falls changed rapidly, fueled by the widespread growth of automobile ownership. The commuter rail line cutting across Washington Street was closed as Route 16 grew in importance for car travel. While the car offered new personal mobility, by the 1970s it had contributed directly to an erosion of the character and visual appeal of Lower Falls. The continuous line of shops along the street edge was broken by new auto-related uses and building types set back from the street to provide visible parking in front. Washington Street became more of a regional artery road than a traditional, pedestrian-friendly Main Street, while the Walnut Street area, directly linked to the nearby highways of Route 9, Route 128 (I-95) and the Mass Turnpike (I-90), developed into an office park entirely oriented to car access.

Today, Lower Falls threatens to become more of a congested link in a travel route of daily commuters than a village center for area residents and workers. Given the wide range of history represented in their architecture, the current buildings of the district do not provide a visually coherent identity. Yet the function of a village center struggles to remain: religious and civic gathering places not found in residential neighborhoods, small-scale shopping not found in malls, potential pedestrian connections to and within a vibrant physical environment, and the recreational opportunities of riverfront open space. All are worth revealing and strengthening. While the traditional cross-road nature of Lower Falls seems at times to have evolved into a drive-through function, other elements of a village center are present as well. The challenge before us is to bring out the improvements, public and private, that will reaffirm the village character of Lower Falls and make it a destination in itself.

*The area of Washington Street closest to the bridge retains a small-scale, pedestrian character despite the many changes brought on by automobile use.*







### III. Existing Conditions

Existing conditions in Lower Falls are marked by the tension between its local retail uses in small-scale settings and its strategic location, easily accessible from a Route 128 (I-95) interchange, attracting regional uses. Both its proximity to the Charles River and the variety of its building stock give Lower Falls the potential to become a visually and physically engaging village center. At the same time, future development and serious parking and traffic issues must be addressed for Lower Falls to realize that potential.

#### Built Form

The current physical condition of Lower Falls has been described briefly in Section II. One of its key features is the contrast between Washington Street, an area of small shops and restaurants, and Walnut Street, where 3- to 5-story office buildings, set back from the street, are surrounded by large parking lots.



*The introduction of street trees, benches, and other pedestrian amenities would greatly improve Washington Street.*

**Washington Street** is the commercial heart of Lower Falls. Approximately one third of the 400,000 square feet of commercial space is devoted to retail uses, while the remaining two thirds are made up of office and light industrial uses. The size of the retail area fits the profile of a small community-oriented center. Half of the buildings on Washington are under 20,000 square feet, and many of them border the street. The architecture is pleasantly eclectic, but some buildings are not as well-maintained as others, marring the appearance of the whole. Auto-related uses and uneven front setbacks interrupt the continuity of the street edge. In addition, the sidewalks are bare and the traffic fierce, making the pedestrian experience along Washington Street difficult. Side alleys and outdoor storage yards are not screened. As one of the main gateways into Wellesley, Washington Street at Lower Falls deserves to be visually improved.

The commercial district is small and built out. The Floor to Area Ratio (FAR) in Wellesley for all non-residential uses is set at .3 in the Zoning Bylaw. More than half of the buildings on Washington Street, built before current zoning standards, are above the FAR of .3. Yet most buildings are one story in height, reflecting the small size of properties. In addition, the off-street parking requirement of 3.2 spaces per 1,000 square feet of new building area\*, further constricts the redevelopment potential of existing properties, particularly small ones. Many of the buildings do not meet their on-site parking requirements. The congested and poorly accessed properties on Mica Lane, vestiges of an industrial past, experience the greatest parking shortage. For convenience stores and restaurants, 3.2 may be too few spaces to meet short-term and peak demand. There are no cooperative parking management agreements here as there are on Walnut Street, with the result that many businesses' customers and employees compete for the same spaces, and there is friction between business owners over parking.

\* See Off-Street parking requirements on page 19.







**Walnut Street**, as an office park, has no retail uses, and the most notable feature of the landscape are the large parking areas surrounding each building. A few of the buildings are under 10,000 square feet, but all of the buildings along Walnut Street itself are significantly larger: the largest is 62,400 square feet and 5 stories tall. Most of the buildings along Walnut exceed the FAR of .3. They do, however, meet the parking requirement of 3.2 spaces per 1,000 square feet of building area. Parking for these buildings appears to work smoothly because of shared parking agreements: when one lot is full, drivers can easily park in spaces belonging to adjacent buildings. This exemplary common management of parking is facilitated by the fact that all but three of the properties along Walnut Street are owned by two firms.

*Vast expanses of parking are the dominant feature of Walnut Street.*



Unfortunately, Walnut Street's automobile-friendly atmosphere deters pedestrians. The sidewalk is intermittent, and without buildings to define its edge is uncomfortably exposed. Frequent curb cuts ensure that anyone walking or bicycling must be on constant lookout for automobiles, and the walk from sidewalk to building entrance invariably involves crossing several rows of parking. Despite the inhospitable conditions, many employees walk along Walnut Street to the Woodland MBTA station. Others walk down River Street to have lunch along Washington Street. Improvements in the pedestrian environment would serve employees well and strengthen the link between the Walnut and Washington Streets areas of Lower Falls.

*The sidewalk along Walnut Street is intermittent, and without buildings to define its edge it is uncomfortably exposed for pedestrians.*





### Descriptions of Washington Street Properties

Address	Owner	Lot Size	Building Size	FAR	Stories	Zone	Use
12 Mica	Levin	17,409	9,452	.5	1	I	office
14 Mica	Gourlay Corporation	9,275	15,400	1.7	2	I	office
16 Mica	Shelly	18,146	17,329	.9	1 & 2	I	office
27 Mica	Berluh & Cronin	35,000	33,600	1.0	3	I	office
11 River	Levine	6,200	5,598	.9	2	B	retail, office
1 Wash	Fineberg	102,404	50,178	.5	4	AP	office
2 Wash	Sun Refining	8,644	2,185	.2	1	B	gas st.
5 Wash	DiLucci	13,330	6,600	.5	1	B	retail
10 Wash	W. Roberts	19,159	8,062	.4	2	B	retail
15 Wash	A&C	10,050	8,241	.8	1	B	retail
16 Wash	W. Roberts	31,744	14,904	.5	1 & 2	BA	retail
26 Wash	Campbell	36,358	8,900	.2	1	I/B	retail
27 Wash	Katzen	217,877	50,361	.2	1	BA	retail
29 Wash	Wellesley Office Assoc.	21,780	20,037	.9	2	BA	retail, office
34 Wash	Haynes	136,311	45,950	.3	2 & 3	IA	club, office
36 Wash	Haynes	64,556	58,100	.9	4	BA/IA	office
40 Wash	Haynes	83,786	26,756	.3	2 ½	BA	office
42 Wash	Haynes	9,186	7,872	.9	3	BA	office
44 Wash	Haynes	7,421	4,717	.6	2 & 3	BA	office
46 Wash	Exxon	9,276	1,484	.2	1	BA	gas st.
51 Wash	Ennis	17,840	2,052	.1	1	R-15	retail
54 Wash	54 Wash	27,039	9,960	.4	1	R-10	retail
6 Wash Ct.	McQuillan	46,457	0	0	2	R-10	mf & car repair

Source: Lower Falls Planning Group. *Lower Falls Planning Study*. February 1996.

### Descriptions of Walnut Street Offices

Address	Owner	Lot Size	Building Size	FAR	Stories	Zone	Use
15	Haynes	40,416	22,680	.6	4	BA	office
20	Haynes	45,800	34,272	.8	4	BA	office
25	Haynes	13,900	11,400	.8	3 ½	BA	office
35	Haynes	57,995	6,980	.1	2	BA/IA	office
37	Haynes	*	8,435	.1	4	IA	office
40	Wellesley Ex.	36,660	32,000	.9	3	BA	office
47	Scott Realty	23,200	4,284	.2	1	IA	office
49	Haynes	74,180	17,528	.2	1 & 2	IA	office
60	Wellesley Ex.	54,365	33,600	.6	3	BA	office
62	Wellesley Ex.	58,760	29,600	.5	3 ½	BA	office
65	Haynes	92,844	62,400	.7	5	BA/IA	office
66	Boston Gas	66,100	0	0	0	SRA	office
70	Wellesley Ex.	50,600	34,000	.7	3 ½	BA	office
80	Whalen Fam.	10,852	2,664	.3	2	BA	office
83	Haynes	25,400	4,989	.2	2	BA/IA	office

### Descriptions of River Street Properties

Address	Owner	Lot Size	Building Size	FAR	Stories	Zone	Use
41	Wellesley	0	0	0	2	LR	mf
47	Haynes	44,555	12,452	.3	2	IA	office
51	S. Roberts	6,850	3,144	.5	2	IA	office
53	Haynes	13,700	3,282	.2	2 ½	IA	office
57	Spaulding	107,358	28,960	.3	4	IA	office

Source: Lower falls Planning Group. *Lower Falls Planning Study*. February 1996.

## Traffic

The overall shortage of parking in the Washington Street area, described above and illustrated in the table below, contributes significantly to one of the most serious problems facing Lower Falls: traffic. Washington Street (Route 16) is one of the main roads through Wellesley, crossing it from Newton to Natick. It is also a major commuter route, connecting to Routes 128 and 9, and to the Massachusetts Turnpike (I-90). Even without interruptions in Lower Falls, Washington Street would be congested during peak commuter hours. Local factors, however, further reduce traffic flow. Within the main commercial area, Washington is two lanes wide, with on street parking along much of its length. There are 11 curb cuts between River Street and Columbia Street: side streets and lanes, driveways to parking areas, entrances and exits to restaurants, gas stations and other properties. Traffic is slowed by drivers needing to turn into or exit from these curb cuts. Mid-block pedestrian crossings and a high turnover of on-street parking provide further interruptions. According to a study completed by Vanasse Hangen Brustlin (VHB), road design impedes traffic flow as well. Entering Wellesley from the east, for example, drivers are confronted with a merge of two lanes into one which immediately snakes right to avoid the left turn lane for River Street, then left to avoid cars parked along the street. As the report puts it, "The result of these series of quick maneuvers is reduced travel speed and safety and increased delay."

The level of congestion, and the perceived danger to pedestrians generated many comments during the first Lower Falls public forum in 1995. Traffic, parking, and pedestrian safety need to be addressed in the near future.



Off-street parking requirements vary by use, zoning district, age structure, and between ground and other floors. In Wellesley Lower Falls they apply to the following:

Use	Zoning District	Minimum Number of Parking Spaces
Office	Administrative and Professional (AP)	1 space/100 sq ft of ground floor area but not less than 3.2 spaces/1,000 sq ft of total building area
Office	Business (B), Business A (BA)	1 space/150 sq ft of ground floor area but not less than 3.2 spaces/1,000 sq ft of total building area
Retail	Industrial (I), Industrial A (IA)	1 space/100 sq ft of area where food is served
Restaurant	Business(B), Business A (BA)	

For the purposes of this report, we have used 3.2 spaces/1,000 sq ft of building area for all commercial uses.

#### Parking Characteristics of the Washington Street Section of Lower Falls

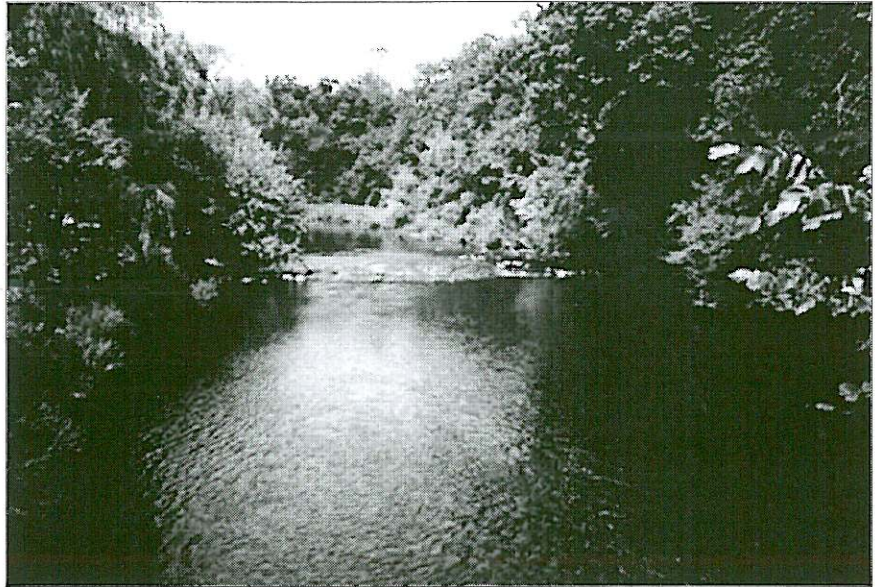
Location	Bldg. Sq. Ft.	Provided	Required	Difference
1 Washington	50,178	173	161	+12
5 Washington	6,600	15	21	-6
Mica Lane	75,781	102	242	-140
15 Washington	8,241	7	26	-19
ROW				
27 Washington	50,361	155	161	-6
29 Washington	20,037	34	64	-30
On-Street				
10 Washington	17,031	5	54	-49
16 Washington	14,904	39	48	-9
26 Washington	8,900	32	28	+4
34-44 Washington	143,395	354	459	-105
Town Lot		63		+63
11 River	5,598	0	18	-18
Total	401,026	1,012	1,282	-270

Source: Lower Falls Planning Group. *Lower Falls Planning Study*. February 1996.



## Open Space

*The Charles River is a potential source of beauty and enjoyment for Lower Falls. A network of paths could provide visual and physical access to the water.*



One of Lower Falls' most striking features is its proximity to the Charles River. On two points of land defined by sharp bends in the River, Lower Falls is cradled in the arms of the Charles. This rich resource is for the most part invisible in the district's current physical form: properties face inward toward Washington and Walnut Streets, rather than outward toward the water. On most streets, it is impossible to see the water, much less walk to it. Notable exceptions are the Bunker Wildlife Sanctuary and the Benjamin Mills Park, but along most of the bank there is no visual or physical access to the Charles.

Providing access to the water for residents of both Wellesley and Newton Lower Falls, a network of paths would provide safe avenues for pedestrian and bicycle circulation off of the center's busy streets, and encourage alternatives to automobile use. Lower Falls will be linked to the MDC's Charles River Pathway, which will eventually stretch from Boston to Dedham. Reintegrating the Charles into Lower Falls would give the Center a distinctive character and a strong recreational draw, bringing in additional visitors.

*Existing riverside parks could anchor a new path network.*





## IV. Community Goals

### Building A Vision

The issues raised during the public meetings held as part of this study reinforced the goals expressed at the first Public Forum on Lower Falls. Land use and zoning, parking and circulation, building scale and street edge, pedestrian experience and open space, all need to be addressed. Because they work together to influence and constrain each other, the components should, as much as possible, be planned as a whole.

With the contribution of participants at the fall meetings we refined the five initial main goals to move forward towards a plan for the future of Lower Falls.

*Maintain the village character of Lower Falls.* Amend zoning requirements to channel future growth towards community-oriented uses and small-scale buildings that reinforce the street edge. Create a focal point of activity to act as the center of Lower Falls.

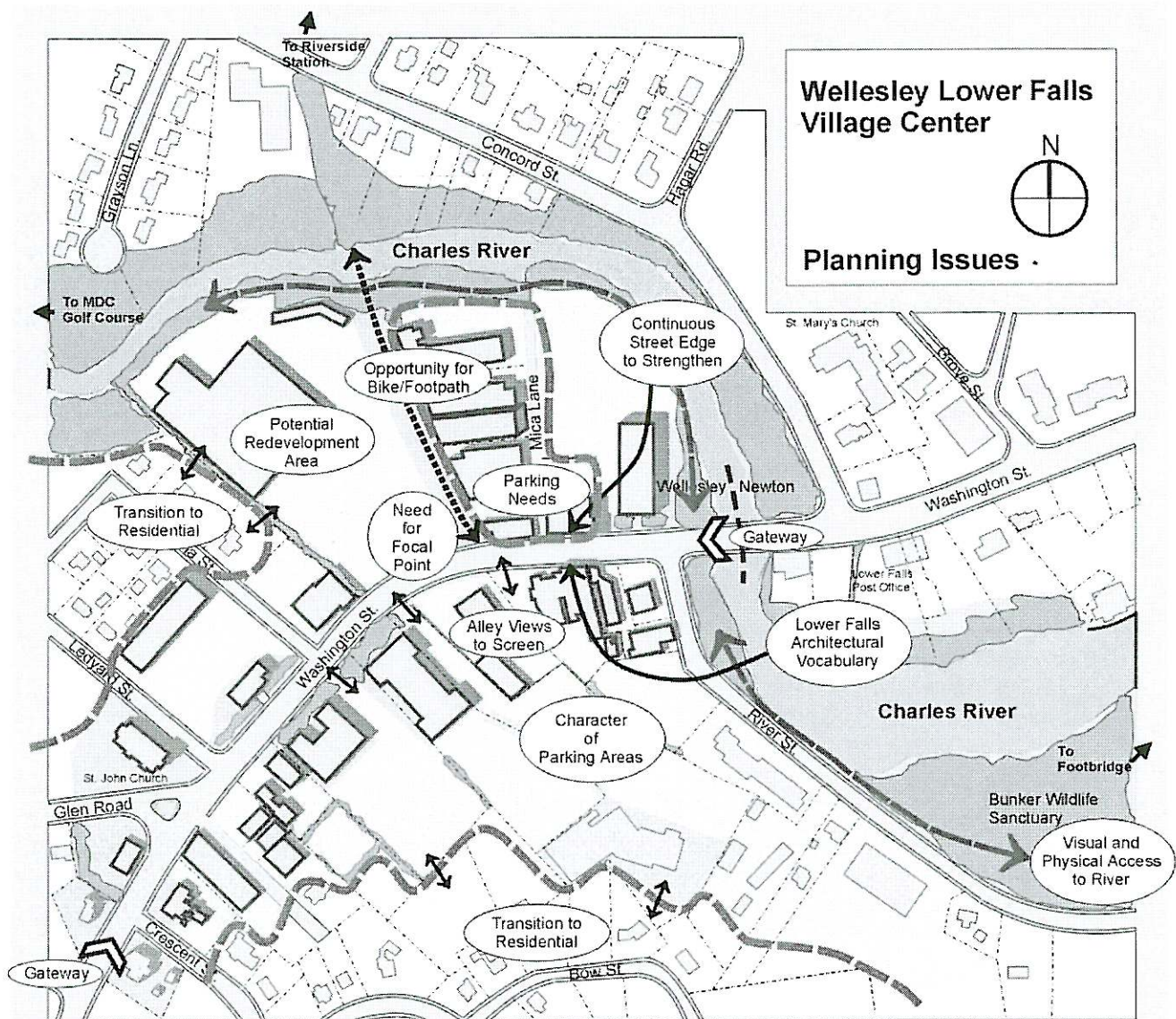
*Address Parking and Traffic Problems.* Support pedestrian-oriented uses to attract more people to the center by increasing the supply of available parking. Reduce requirements for off-street parking for small properties, to encourage the development of pedestrian-oriented buildings. Relieve impediments to traffic flow, not to increase speed, but to improve and simplify movement. Enforce existing traffic regulations in Lower Falls.

*Enhance Building Appearance.* Improve the quality of existing facades and storefronts, and encourage future redevelopment and new buildings to be consistent in scale and massing with the goal of strengthening the village character of Lower Falls.

*Improve Pedestrian Experience.* Enhance the street environment with landscaping, lighting, and furnishings, improve pedestrian safety, and provide clear connections between off-street parking and destinations, Walnut and Washington Streets, and surrounding neighborhoods and the center.

*Strengthen Access to Lower Falls' Natural Environment.* Create a network of public paths to and along the Charles River, connect existing riverfront parks, bridge the Wellesley and Newton sides of Lower Falls with foot and bike paths, and identify open space areas for recreation. Encourage the long-term redevelopment of riverfront properties to be oriented towards the River, in use as well as in building.

These five goals form the backbone of the following Zoning Recommendations and Urban Design and Landscape Guidelines.



## Planning Issues



## V. Zoning for the Future

### Current Zoning

Properties along Washington Street in Lower Falls are currently zoned under one of five districts: Business (B), Business A (BA), Administrative and Professional (AP), Industrial (I) and Industrial A (IA). B and I districts were established in 1929, and BA and IA districts in 1950. The later districts allow more uses and break down different parking requirements by type of use. For practical purposes today, the distinctions between these districts are obsolete.

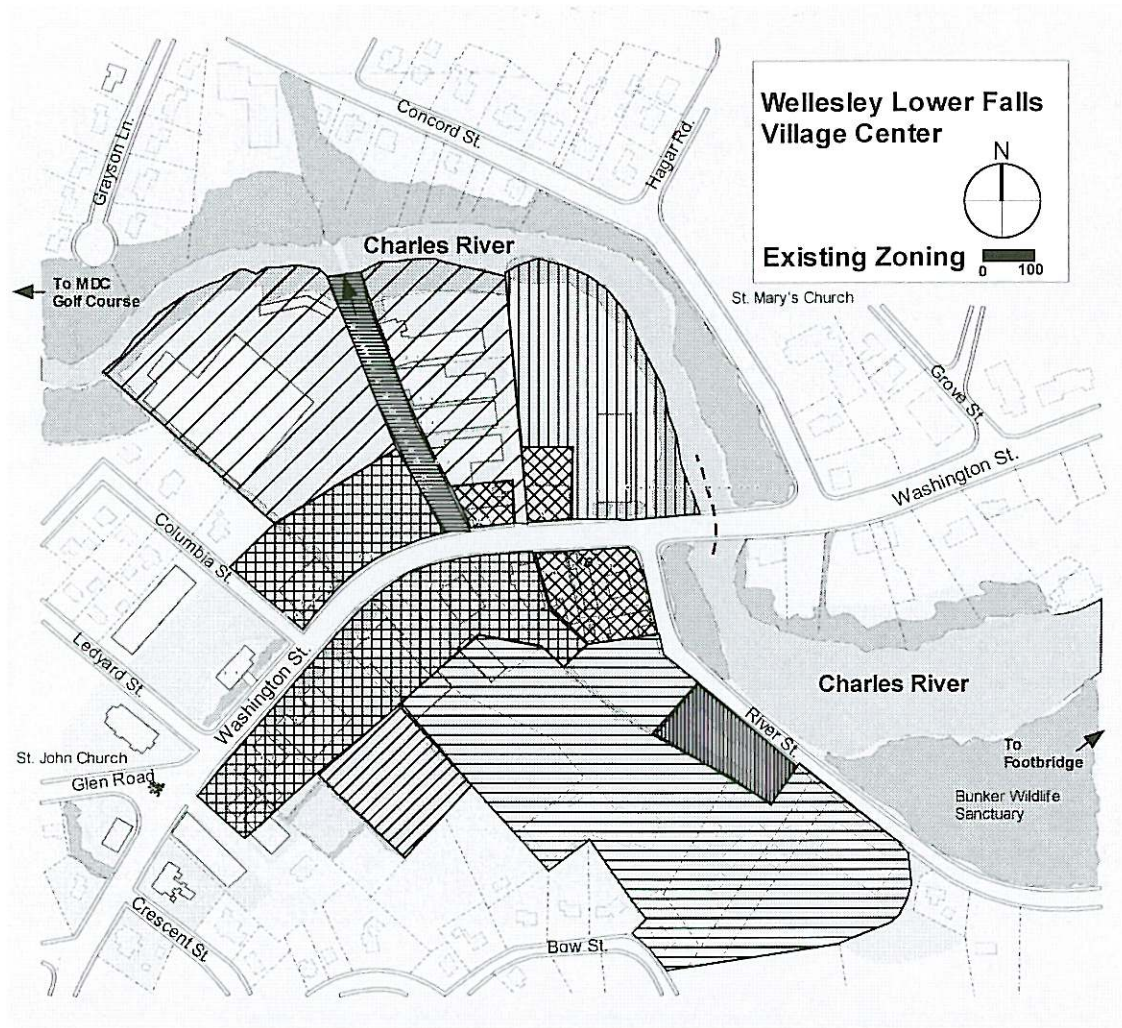
The Business zones extend from Washington Street to a depth of one property lot on either side, while the Industrial zones begin at that line and reach back to the Charles River on the north and to River Street on the south. The large sites of 27 Washington Street and 34-44 Washington Street have split business/industrial zoning between their frontage on Washington Street and the rest of the property.

With the exceptions of 27, 26, and 2 Washington Street, the commercial district is built up to capacity. New growth will only occur through the redevelopment of existing properties. Small sites are constricted by the FAR of .3 and more significantly by the on-site parking requirement of 3.2 spaces per 1,000 square feet of building area. Large sites assembled from previously separate properties could be redeveloped with new buildings set back from the street, further eroding the street wall along Washington Street.

Current uses by right in the Business districts include retail stores of up to 50,000 square feet. Retail stores above 50,000 square feet are allowed by special permit. This could mean large footprint retail buildings with high parking needs and traffic impacts. Uses by right also include gas stations, car repair, and printing plants, while uses by special permit include a variety of other auto-related uses, as well as tool rental and sale, outdoor storage, and retail sales of trailers and boats.

The combined effect of current zoning is to allow a possible worst case scenario: smaller properties, unable to grow, will be consolidated into ever larger properties to be developed into either retail uses with a regional market or more office park buildings. Small-scale retail and convenience shopping will disappear, as will small-scale buildings at the edge of the street. Traffic flow will no longer be impeded by on-street parking or pedestrian crossings, and the riverfront will be a well-landscaped backdrop to seamless private parking lots.

This is an exaggerated scenario, and depends more on market forces than on zoning laws. But it serves to illustrate the tension between a strong regional location in a car-oriented economy on the one hand, and the other, the physical and functional character of a village center.



- |                                 |                         |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Administrative and Professional | Industrial              |
| Business                        | Industrial A            |
| Business A                      | Single Residence A      |
| Limited Residence               | Transportation District |

Existing Zoning



## **Proposed Zoning Changes**

Two zoning changes are proposed to shape Lower Falls over the long term into the vision expressed through community goals. A Lower Falls Commercial Zoning District is tailored to strengthen the small-scale commercial character of Lower Falls, encouraging a fine-grained, pedestrian-oriented environment. A Residential Incentive Overlay District is offered to guide future development by providing positive incentives for change.

### **Lower Falls Commercial (LFC) Zoning**

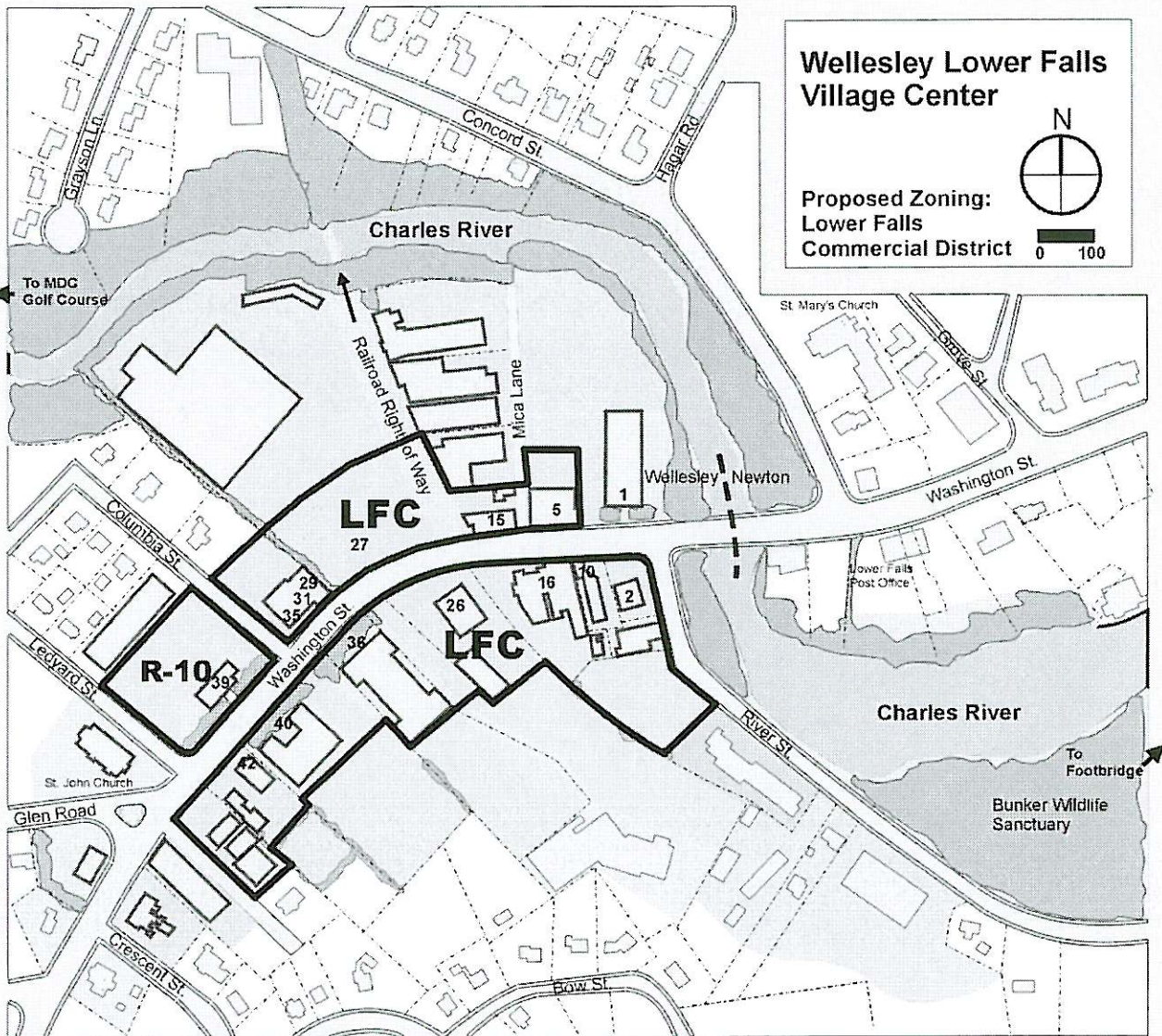
Lower Falls Commercial (LFC) Zoning consolidates current Business and Business A districts fronting on Washington Street and River Street to the elderly housing development. LFC limits the uses that would be permitted by right to retail uses of 10,000 square feet, as well as restaurants, offices, and public buildings, among others. Retail stores larger than 10,000 square feet, drive-through facilities, dry-cleaning stores, and gas stations would be allowed only by special permit.

To support the growth necessary for a vibrant center, the FAR is allowed to raise up to 1.0 by special permit in the LFC zone, while building height is limited to 2 stories or 36'. The off-street parking requirement remains 3.2 spaces per 1,000 sq ft of building area, but this requirement is decoupled from the on-site provision. Any commercial use within 500 feet of a public parking area with at least 50 spaces needs to provide on site 2.5 spaces per 1,000 sq ft of building. Further, to encourage the construction of upper story uses along Washington Street, the first 4,000 sq ft of upper story space within 500 feet of such a public parking area will be exempt from parking regulations altogether.

To encourage redevelopment that reinforces the street edge, buildings have a maximum front setback of 10' and a minimum of 5' from the street, allowing room for landscaping and pedestrian amenities. Finally, the side and rear setbacks are changed to allow for landscaped buffers between commercial and residential properties.

A table comparing the characteristics of existing Business and Business A zoning and the proposed Lower Falls Commercial zoning is presented after the map.

These changes do not affect existing properties which are not planning to redevelop. They allow smaller buildings to economically reinvest in vertical expansion or new construction, while contributing to strengthening the small-scale village character of Lower falls.



Proposed Changes:  
Lower Falls Commercial (LFC) zoning district along Washington Street and portion of River Street.  
Church property to Residential (R-10).  
Existing zoning unchanged for the rest of Lower Falls properties.

## Proposed Zoning



## Zoning Comparison

### Existing Zoning Districts

### Proposed New Zoning District

	BUSINESS	BUSINESS A	LOWER FALLS COMMERCIAL
Uses by right	one family dwelling two family dwelling townhouse 3 or more units boarding house, lodging house apartment house restaurant retail less than 50,000 square feet office, bank theater, hall, club gasoline filling station storage or parking of motor vehicles motor vehicle repair printing plant telephone exchange veterinary hospital light manufacturing hotel, inn customary accessory use public building	(same as BUSINESS)	restaurant retail store less than 10,000 square feet theater, hall, club office, bank veterinary hospital light manufacturing hotel, inn customary accessory use public building
Uses by special permit	automated car wash dry cleaning motor vehicle sale autobody/paint shop sale/rental trailer, boats recreational vehicle tool rental/sale sales from trailer vehicles drive-through facility retail store over 50,000 square feet	(same as BUSINESS)	drive-through facility dry cleaning gasoline service station retail store over 10,000 sq ft
Site plan approval	yes	yes	yes
Off-street parking	3.2/1,000 SF	3.2/1,000 SF	In accordance with zoning by-law. However, if a commercial use is within 500 feet of a public parking area with at least 50 spaces, the required off-street parking shall be 2.5 spaces per 1,000 gross square feet of commercial area. Further the first 4,000 SF of upper story space shall be exempt from parking regulations.
Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	0.30	0.30	1.0
Height	3 ½ stories or 45'	3 ½ stories or 45'	2 stories or 36'
Setbacks	0	30' front yard	Side yards, when abutting a commercial use, 0 feet; when abutting a residential use, 20 feet. Front yard setback shall be a maximum of 10 feet but not less than 5 feet. Rear yard setbacks shall be 20 feet.

## **Residential Incentive Overlay (RIO) District**

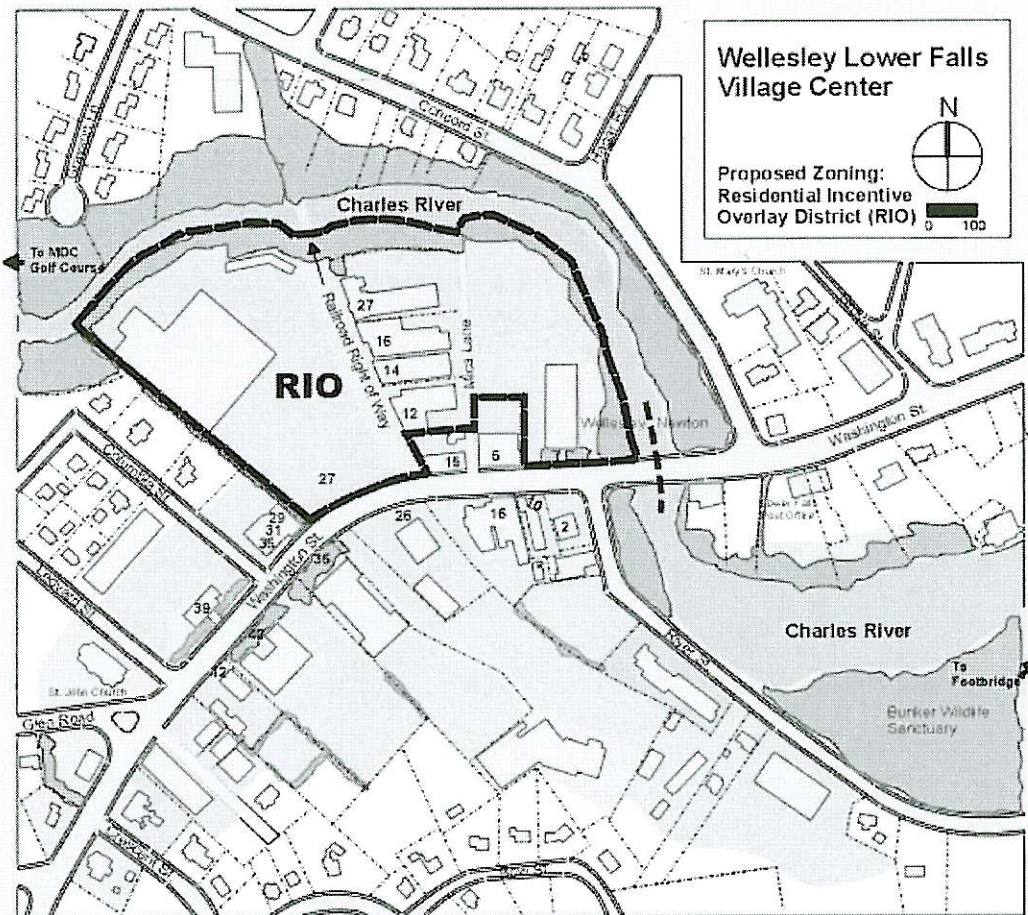
The Residential Incentive Overlay (RIO) District is a longer-term strategy to guide the future character of Lower Falls. It provides an incentive for large sites currently zoned business or industrial to redevelop into residential uses, should the operations of the former uses become less competitive because of access constraints or changing market conditions. The incentive is a raised FAR, for properties at or below .3, to .5.

As an overlay, RIO confers additional development rights without removing *any* existing rights. It allows a site of at least two acres, or an existing building of at least 25,000 sq ft, to be converted into assisted elderly living, independent elderly housing, or conventional multi-family housing, at a higher density than currently allowed under an FAR of .3.

Residential uses would complement the village character of Lower Falls, add a resident population to support local retail, reduce parking needs and traffic impacts, and take advantage of the amenities of riverfront property. Over the long term, Lower Falls would be well served with residential development along the River, continuing the community character of surrounding neighborhoods.

The Residential Incentive Overlay District applies to the property at 27 Washington Street, the Mica Lane properties and One Washington Street, following the existing zoning boundaries on these sites under Business, Business A, and Industrial.





Proposed Addition:  
Residential Incentive Overlay (RIO) District over 27 Washington Street, Mica Lane properties and One Washington Street, leaving underlying zoning unchanged.

## Residential Incentive Overlay District





## VI. Urban Design and Landscape Guidelines

### Proposed Urban Design and Landscape Guidelines

The Guidelines reflect agreement within the community that the attractiveness of the commercial center of Lower Falls is important to the Town as a whole and essential to enhancing its village character. They also reflect a commitment on the part of the Town of Wellesley to play an important role in initiating public improvements that set a tone and direction for private improvements to complement.

This section is divided into two parts:

Public Environment: guidelines for public improvements to streets and their furnishings and public open spaces;

Private Environment: guidelines for the redevelopment of existing properties and new construction, covering buildings, site planning, parking areas, landscaping, facades, storefronts, and signage.

The Guidelines are recommendations, not inflexible requirements. Their purpose is to assist the private-public dialogue on matters affecting the appearance of Lower Falls in order to build and enhance its character.

### How Each Section of the Guidelines is Organized

The opening statement in each section summarizes the overall objective of the section. Individual guidelines follow and expand on it. *Italicized text* is used to provide general information on existing conditions and to explain the rationale of specific guidelines. These guidelines and recommendations are shown in **bold face text**. Following the bold face text, plain text and bullets are used to expand on the guideline and supplement it with more specific advice.

## A. Public Environment

### GUIDELINES FOR PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS

*In Lower Falls, the diversity of the private environment places particular responsibility on the public environment to provide a clear structure through the design of streets, open spaces, sidewalks, street furniture and lighting. A public environment which possesses a strong and consistent character can unify the center visually, while enabling the diversity of Lower Falls' architecture to spring into relief.*

*With the reconstruction of Washington Street, the public environment in Wellesley has been undergoing rapid and beneficial change. Improvements include new lighting, landscaping, sidewalks and crosswalks. Improvements in all of these areas would benefit Lower Falls as well, helping to establish a distinct character and pedestrian-friendly public environment along Washington Street, Walnut Street, side streets and alleys, public open spaces and the parks along the Charles River.*

### LIGHTING

*Different light fixtures are appropriate for different locations. Streetlights can be different from lights in parks, for example, reflecting different illumination needs. To coordinate the overall identity of the center, however, similar pedestrian-scale light fixtures could be used to transform the character of streets and public spaces. Beyond the provision of light, the role of street lights would be to give a recognizable character to all of Lower Falls and emphasize continuous links among its various parts.*

**Use pedestrian-scale light fixtures of 10' to 14' high along Washington Street, of a simple historical design to blend with the character of Lower Falls.**

**Consider installing the same light fixtures along the office park section of Walnut Street, to better integrate the two areas of Lower Falls.**

**Install light fixtures at intervals of between 70' to 80' to light sidewalks, public spaces such as the redeveloped right-of-way, and public parking areas.**

**Coordinate with the Metropolitan District Commission the choice of light fixtures for future pedestrian paths, bikeways, and parks along the Charles.**





*Sidewalks along sections of Washington Street are wide enough for circulation but without pedestrian furnishings are bare and uninviting.*

## PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIONS

*Convenient and welcoming pedestrian connections are vital to a vibrant center. Connections should be designed or enhanced so that people feel comfortable and safe walking between destinations. Merchants benefit from well-used pedestrian ways as people are more likely to shop or use services when it is pleasant to be on the street, and when destinations are identified by pathways from points of origin.*

### Sidewalks

*Wide sidewalks allow for landscaping and street furniture that greatly improve the pedestrian experience.*

**Sidewalks should be between 5' and 10' wide and incorporate street furnishings.**

The proposed new zoning district of Lower Falls Commercial includes a

- front setback for new buildings of between 5' and 10' to provide
- enough room next to the public sidewalk for private landscaping and for
- benches to be set against the edge of the sidewalk away from the street.

### Alleys and Walkways

*Pedestrian alleys and walkways provide a smaller scale and convenient way to move from parking lots to Washington and River Streets. They must be perceived as safe in order to be useful as alternate routes and short-cuts. Thus they should be well-lit and incorporate planting, street furniture, and wall or ground surface treatments wherever possible.*

*If Mica Lane is closed to traffic or restricted to a one way entrance only, as proposed in previous studies and in this report, it could become an attractive pedestrian path from parking areas to stores along Washington Street, with trees, lights, and distinctive paving.*







*This walkway between the municipal parking lot and private parking lots on higher ground is an excellent example of an attractive, safe, well landscaped and pleasant pedestrian connection.*

### **Improve pedestrian amenities and safety along alleys and walkways.**

- Install lights along the entire length of an alley.
- Landscape the alley at its end connections.
- Vary surface materials. Use high-quality paving that extends along the length of a passage.
- Provide street furniture such as benches, trash receptacles, and planters where alley width permits.
- Design improvements to permit effective snow removal and emergency access.

### **Crosswalks**

*Crossing Washington Street is a pedestrian challenge in Lower Falls. In order to improve safety, crosswalks should be made more visible and perhaps one more added. The location of the new crosswalk will depend on the redevelopment of 27 Washington Street and the traffic mitigation measures that will result.*

**All crosswalks should be clearly marked to increase their visibility to drivers and improve pedestrian safety.**

- Contrast the surface treatment with the asphalt by painting crosswalks in a color or pattern that stands out against the street.
- Use a contrasting material, such as brick pavers set into the asphalt.
- Introduce a slightly raised surface.





*Where sidewalks are too narrow for trees, planters can add warmth to a street.*

## LANDSCAPING

### Street Trees

*Tree-lined streets greatly enhance the appearance and comfort of an urban area. Trees lend a pedestrian scale to the street, and provide shade and a welcome contrast to the buildings lining the street.*

**Plant street trees at intervals of between 25' minimum and 50' maximum to establish rhythm and create a consistent, inviting character for Washington Street.**

**Consider planting street trees along Walnut Street to create a pedestrian-friendly environment in this area of Lower Falls and better integrate it with Washington Street.**

- Where buildings are of a consistent scale, align street trees with dividing walls between stores to minimize the obstruction of signs.
- Select street trees which will eventually provide a canopy at approximately the height of the second story.
- Mix the tree species for visual interest and longevity of the landscape through spring, summer and fall.
- Select tree species along streets for their compact growth and resistance to difficult conditions and along parks for their wide canopy and shade.

### Shrubs and flowering plants

*Shrubs can be useful supplements to tree planting where pedestrian ways meet major streets and in the islands of parking lots. They can also screen parking lots and service areas without obstructing sight lines. In addition, flowering plants can add a special warmth and cheer to a storefront or pedestrian way.*

**Plant shrubs and flowering plants along pedestrian connections, around seating areas and at focal points in public open spaces.**

**Plant evergreen shrubs characterized by dense growth to screen parking areas, outdoor storage areas and alleys.**



*Wide sidewalks, street trees, benches and other furnishings create outdoor rooms in the public environment.*

## STREET FURNITURE

*Street furniture plays an important role in conveying the character of a district. It should be selected for style as well as comfort and durability. It is important that the character of various elements be coordinated.*

### Benches

*Locate benches so that they encourage the enjoyment of specific open*





*Existing view of north side of Washington Street.*



*View with street trees.*



*or outdoor spaces, whether along the sidewalk, in public open spaces, or along the Charles River. Seating and lighting can be used to signal pedestrian connections. The orientation of benches is also critical, although contingent upon sidewalk width. They may be used to facilitate gathering, people-watching, sun-bathing, or respite from the sun. In all cases, they should be located with these activities in mind.*

**Provide benches and other seating areas to encourage the expanded use of the village center and the River.**

Benches should be

- fixed to the ground;
- coordinated with other streetscape elements, such as light fixtures, trash receptacles, and planters.

### **Trash Receptacles**

*Trash receptacles help keep a commercial center clean while signaling that pedestrians are welcome to use the area. When coordinated with other streetscape elements, they add to the consistent character of public spaces.*

**Install attractive trash receptacles, coordinated with other streetscape elements.**

**Select a single style to be used throughout the center.**

- In general, one trash receptacle should be located near every bench or group of benches (preferably downwind).
- Trash receptacles should be placed approximately every 60' along sidewalks.

### **Bicycle Racks**

*Bicycle racks are a necessary component of bikeways, reduce car traffic and parking by allowing errands and shopping to be done on bicycle, and provide opportunities for seating areas where cyclists become pedestrians. Racks should be provided at specific destination points, such as parks.*

**Provide bicycle racks at the beginning of the proposed bikeway through the right-of-way and at destination points along the riverfront parks.**

**Provide bicycle racks at key intersections in the center in order to encourage the use of bicycles among residents.**

*Lower Falls lacks a central open space that would act as a focal point and meeting ground for a variety of pedestrian activities. There is, however, a significant opportunity to start with the opening of the town-owned railroad right-of-way for a bikeway and pedestrian path, and to reuse the bridge trestle to connect the Wellesley and Newton sides of Lower Falls over the Charles River. Additionally, a network of pedestrian paths along the Charles could connect existing riverfront parks. Finally, the redevelopment of 27 Washington Street could offer the opportunity of creating a Town Green in the center of Lower Falls (see Planning Proposals for more details).*

**Reuse the railroad right-of-way for a bikeway and pedestrian path.**

**Rebuild the bridge trestle to extend the bikeway and pedestrian path to the Newton side of Lower Falls over the Charles River.**

**Coordinate with the MDC the development of continuous pedestrian paths along the edge of the Charles River.**

**Explore the possibility of creating a Town Green at the street edge of 27 Washington Street, connected to the bikeway and pedestrian path of the right-of-way.**

- The existing parks along River Street could be made more visible through distinctive and consistent identification and interpretive signs.

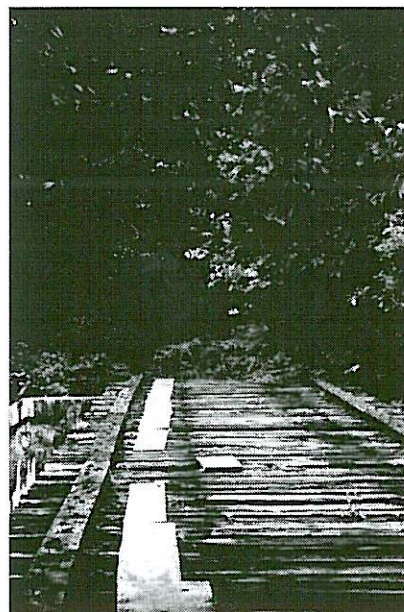
## **PARKING**

*The shortage of both long-term parking, for employees, and of short-term parking, for shoppers, customers, and visitors, is a significant constraint to the full enjoyment and future growth of commercial uses in Lower Falls. Existing parking in the Washington Street area is not shared or commonly managed as it is in the Walnut Street area because of different ownership and uses patterns.*

**Explore with the owners of large parking lots along Washington Street the possibility of developing cooperative agreements for sharing parking use with smaller businesses and with the public on evenings and week-ends.**

**Explore ways of increasing the supply of municipal parking in Lower Falls, to support existing and future small-scale retail uses.**

- See the Planning Proposals section of this report for further discussion and illustration of parking solutions for Lower Falls.



*The railroad trestle over the Charles at the end of the right-of-way is still structurally sound, and would make a beautiful pedestrian and bicycle bridge between the Wellesley and Newton sides of Lower Falls.*



## B. Private Environment

### GUIDELINES FOR REHABILITATION, REDEVELOPMENT OR NEW CONSTRUCTION

#### 1. BUILDINGS & FACADES



*Retail buildings along Washington Street range from one to two-and-a-half stories. The building at 12 Washington Street is a model of good proportions, storefront design, and signs.*

**Buildings and facades should be compatible with the size and character of Lower Falls' buildings, and should encourage active street life.**

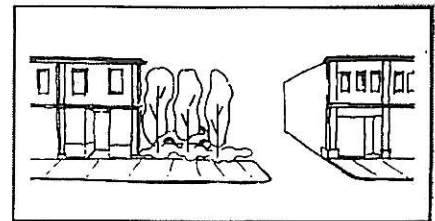
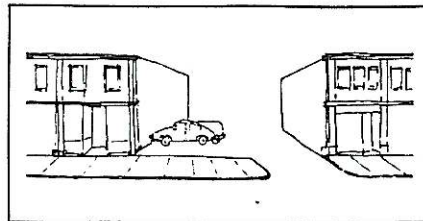
*The Town of Wellesley's Design Guidelines Handbook clearly state the policy and criteria for requiring that buildings be compatible with the scale and character of Lower Falls.*

The design of proposed new construction should acknowledge and respect the surrounding existing patterns of development, and should be such that those desirable existing patterns are complemented and strengthened. Buildings shall be visually related to their surroundings with respect to:

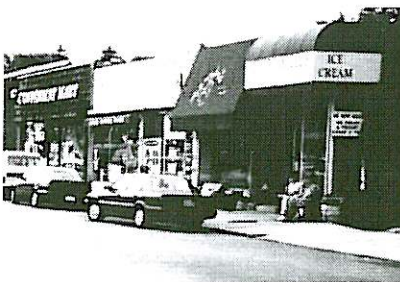
Height  
Materials  
Rhythm of solids and voids  
Open space and landscapes

Street facade  
Roof slopes  
Scale  
Fenestration

*Landscaping and other forms of screening such as fences, can greatly improve the character of these parking lots by preserving the street edge and screening off bleak expanses of asphalt.*



#### SITE PLANNING, LANDSCAPING AND PARKING AREAS



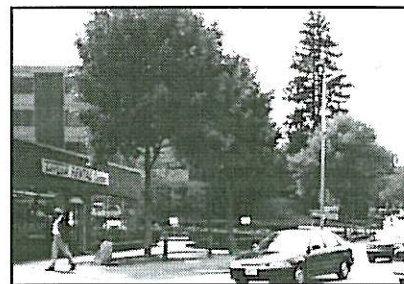
*These buildings make a strong edge for the sidewalk, giving pedestrians a sense of enclosure.*

*To maintain and strengthen the compact village character of Lower Falls, commercial uses should be bordered and separated by a landscaped buffer from residential properties.*

*Parking areas within Lower Falls should continue to be located behind buildings. The change from large setbacks to buildings fronting the sidewalk helps to signal the entry from residential neighborhoods to the village center. Where existing parking areas are located in front of or next to buildings, every effort should be made to mitigate their visual impact. Landscaping and other forms of screening such as fences, can greatly improve the character of these parking lots by preserving the street edge and screening off bleak expanses of asphalt. Lots should also be subdivided by internal landscaping, with sidewalks provided to improve the experience to and from stores and office buildings.*

**Provide landscaped buffers between non-residential (excluding institutional) and residential uses in Lower Falls.**

- All commercial and industrial properties, as per their zoning designation, developed and actively used for retail, office, and light industrial uses, should provide a continuous landscaped buffer or border, of no less than 5' in width, along the length of the property line which abuts a residential property, developed and actively used for residential purposes.
- All provisions of the Wellesley Zoning Bylaw under SECTION XXI. OFF STREET PARKING. SUBPART 3. DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS. SCREENING, as to the choice of species to plant, their height, screening effectiveness and maintenance, described in the required screening of parking, storage and service areas from public and private ways and from residential properties, shall apply to this new category of landscaped buffer between non-residential and residential uses.
- Comply with current zoning requirements of screening, by means of landscaping or fencing, all parking areas, outdoor storage, and service areas along the length of such areas that abutts a public or private way or a residential property.



*Landscaping in front of Taylor's Rental helps to screen its parking from the street.*

**Locate Buildings in ways that respect older site planning in Lower Falls, with parking behind the building.**

- Under the proposed Lower Falls commercial zoning district, buildings to be substantially rehabilitated, redeveloped or built new, will be located at street edge, with a front setback of between 5' and 10'.
- Use the setback from the street for landscaping, to widen the pedestrian way, or to provide a backdrop for street furniture such as benches.
- Parking should be located behind buildings and be screened from the street and from adjacent residential areas.

**Minimize both the number and width of curb cuts in Lower Falls.**

- Design entrances and exits of parking areas with the objective of reducing curb cuts to an absolute minimum along Washington Street, River Street, and Walnut Street, notwithstanding that the zoning bylaw allows two driveways per street line of a lot [SECTION XXI. 3. B.]
- Explore cooperative legal agreements with owners of adjoining properties to share private driveways and alleys, and with the Town to use public ways and alleys for access to and exit from parking areas.
- Design access and circulation patterns to make adjoining sites work together in the larger context of the commercial area or business district rather than within the individual lot.
- Use clear signs rather than physical barriers to identify and direct parking access and circulation.



**Provide perimeter landscaping around all parking lots where they abut the street or residential lots.**

Observe the requirements of the Wellesley Bylaw under SECTION XXI. OFF-STREET PARKING. SUBPART 3. DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS. LANDSCAPING.

- For any outdoor parking area of 20 or more parking spaces, plant at least one tree for every 10 parking spaces on any side of the parking area abutting a public or private way or abutting the lot line of a residential property.

**Include internal landscape divisions in larger parking lots and enhance the pedestrian experience.**

Observe the Wellesley Zoning Bylaw under SECTION XXI. 3. LANDSCAPING.

- In any outdoor parking area provide a landscaped open space of not less than 10% of the parking area.
- A minimum of half of that landscaped area shall be located in the interior of the parking area.

Additional guidelines include:

- *Internal landscaped islands:* Islands and planting schemes should be designed to accommodate snow plowing. The height and spacing of plants should be selected in order to preserve visibility across the lots.
- *Sidewalks:* In large parking lots, provide sidewalks wherever possible in order to guide pedestrians safely from their cars into buildings.

**In all parking lots, use pedestrian-scale light fixtures.**

Over-sized, and sometimes over-bright, parking lot lighting can be a nuisance for surrounding residential properties and passing motorists. Carefully chosen pedestrian-scale lighting fixtures, with baffles where necessary, can avoid these problems, and be attractive in daylight. Lighting should be contained within the lot to avoid spill-over into adjacent areas. Light levels should be sufficient to ensure adequate vision and a sense of security, but not overly bright. In general, lighting should be concentrated on stores, signs, and walkways rather than diffused over the entire lot.



*Interior landscaping improves the appearance of the parking lot and cools the pavement.*

## **BUILDING HEIGHT**

*Greater building height can serve to strengthen the character of streets and define the public environment.. Many buildings in Lower Falls are one story, which on a street as wide as Washington Street create an environment with little sense of enclosure. Increasing the height of some buildings to two or two-and-half stories would promote visual harmony with the taller buildings, and create a more inviting pedestrian environment. The more people are engaged in business activity and living in the village center, the more lively the streets will become. Under the proposed Lower Falls commercial zoning district, the FAR is increased to 1.0 and building heights of up to 2 1/2 stories are encouraged. If building a two-story building or adding a story to an existing building is not feasible, a good sense of proportion can be created by adding a parapet to a one-story building. This adds to the sense of enclosure and provides an avenue for distinctive architectural detailing.*

**Add an upper story to existing one-story buildings, or build new buildings to a height of up to two-and-a-half stories to increase small-scale retail uses and pedestrian activity in Lower Falls.**

- One story buildings could be brought to one-and-a-half stories with carefully designed parapets or cornices to further define the public environment.

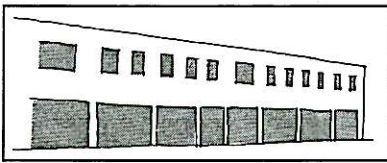
## **COMPOSITION OF THE BUILDING FACADE**

*Despite the current diversity of architecture and facade materials, the buildings along Washington Street share many common characteristics which can be enhanced to establish a cohesive identity for Lower Falls. Facades tend to be subdivided into smaller areas, both in their height and width.*





*Typically, the ground levels of commercial buildings have a distinctly different physical character from the floor above, reflecting different uses.*



*On the first floor, vertical piers frame storefronts dominated by windows, while on the second floor, windows take up far less of the facade.*

*Brick piers divide this facade on Washington Street into different storefronts.*

### ***Dividing the Building's Height into Street and Upper-levels***

*Typically, the ground levels of commercial buildings have a distinctly different physical character from the floors above them, reflecting different uses, with storefronts containing large glazed display windows and relatively little wall area, while upper levels are predominantly for office uses, with a larger proportion of wall within which windows are located.*

### ***Dividing the Building's Width into Smaller Bays***

*Building facades along Washington Street are typically divided into smaller bays by a frame of vertical piers, which usually - but not always - reflects the location of structural columns or walls. The repetition of bay units of similar sizes helps to establish a common visual theme, scale, and rhythm among buildings of different eras.*

### **Distinguish and coordinate the design of upper and first floors, and divide facades into smaller bays.**

*Use a "frame" to divide the facade into smaller bays and give definition to each store.*

*Clearly distinguish between "frame" and "infill" elements through changes in color and/or materials, by such means as slightly recessing infill elements. Consider providing a space where an awning could be attached.*



### ***Divide the building's height into street-level and upper levels.***

*Distinguish between the character of the first floor and the upper stories. Windows and other elements of the upper stories should be related but not identical to the design of the first floor. Modest upper level windows can be designed to divert attention to important entrances, storefront displays, and other key features of the ground floor. Continuous horizontal strip windows are not recommended on either floor, particularly when they continue across a number of first floor stores.*



Such windows can obscure the distinction between individual storefronts, and provide insufficient glass area for the storefront facade.

*The proportions and sizes of individual elements - doors, windows, bays and horizontal facade divisions - should respect the proportions and scale of Lower Falls' older commercial architecture.*

Typical bay widths of commercial buildings vary from 15' to 25'. Access to street level commercial establishments should be provided at least every 30'.

*Define the top of the building.*

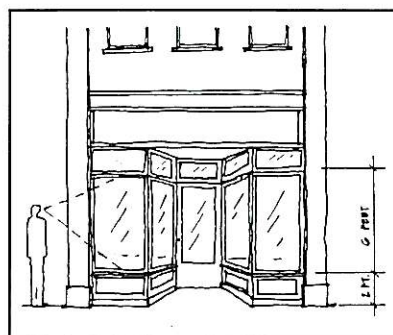
A building can be enhanced by the use of a cornice or parapet, a decorative and functional "top" for the building where it meets the sky. The cornice serves to frame the building facade horizontally and contributes to the visual cohesion of the overall streetscape by establishing common lines between buildings.

## **SPECIAL TREATMENT OF THE FIRST FLOOR**

*The design of street level facades and store window displays requires special attention to enhance Lower Falls' pedestrian environment. Large windows help to develop strong visual connections between the interior and exterior, allowing people to peer into a store or restaurant to see some of its merchandise or judge its atmosphere.*

**Provide large display windows along the first floor to maintain strong visual connections between the interior and exterior.**

- A minimum of 70% of the linear frontage of the first floor facade should comprise doors and windows with clear glass. At least 50% of the area of entrance doors should also be clear glass.
- Sill heights for any windows included in this calculation should not exceed 2 feet above sidewalk level.
- Tops of windows should be at least 8 feet above grade.



*Glass display windows should be sized to fit the average person's field of vision.*

## **MATERIALS AND COLORS**

*The use of a limited number of materials and well-placed, but not opulent, trim can lend commercial buildings a simplicity and distinction able to accommodate changing storefronts and complement the streetscape. Brick or stucco with either stone or wood trim is recommended.*

**Use materials and colors which are compatible with the character of the building and Lower Falls.**

*Materials:* New construction should in general conform to one of the types described above and use materials and trim details to blend with existing older commercial architecture in the center. Careful attention to



small scale details is encouraged to add to the visual interest of the pedestrian level streetscape.

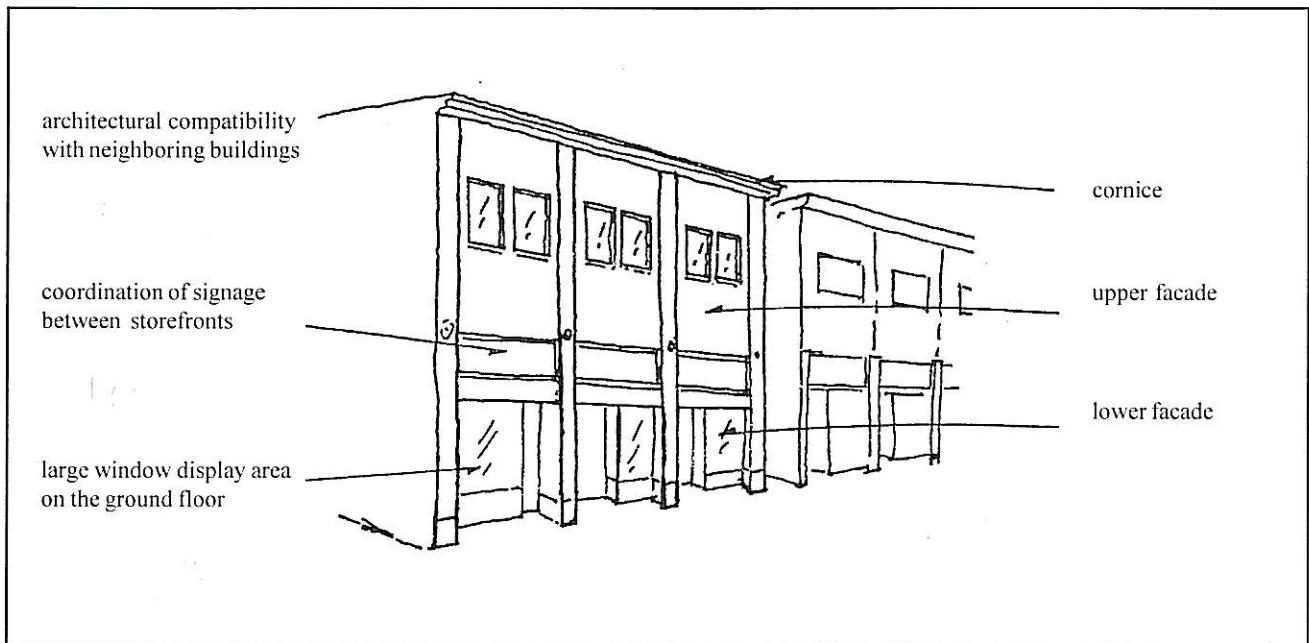
**Color:** Good color takes cues from the architecture of the building. Limit the number of colors selected. Highlighting numerous details in different colors may look too busy. Major building elements, such as piers, columns and sign bands should be painted the same color throughout the building. It should be kept in mind that signs add yet another layer of visual complexity to the facade. Masonry has its own natural color and should not be painted, except under special circumstances.

## RENOVATION AND RESTORATION

*Identify and preserve important architectural features which contribute to the quality of the building and Lower Falls as a whole. Such features include columns, cornices, lintels, transom windows (a window band sometimes located above the shop window and door), panels, distinctive woodwork and copper and slate roofs. Distinctive original features of the building such as architectural brickwork or wood decoration should not be covered up; they are an asset. Remove later additions of facade elements that conceal such features if possible.*

**Preserve and enhance facades and character-defining architectural features of high quality buildings.**

**Do not cover distinctive original features of a building, and remove such covers wherever possible.**



*Suggestions for facades*



## Facade Improvements at 5 Washington Street





## BACKS OF BUILDINGS AND ALLEYS

Many parking areas within Lower Falls are located behind buildings. As a result, the backs of many buildings which were not originally intended to be seen are now secondary 'fronts' for businesses or other buildings. All the surfaces of a commercial building have the potential to contribute to the success of the businesses within, but many buildings fail to take advantage of this, contributing to the bleak character of parking lots.

This is also an issue for the office buildings along Walnut Street, but in reverse. There, the functional main entrance often faces the parking lot, on the rear facade of the building. The formal front door, facing the street, is often used for deliveries only; pedestrians coming from the street have to walk all the way around to the back to enter. Re-establishing front doors, and thus opening buildings to the street would recognize and improve the pedestrian experience along Walnut Street.



The 'front door' of this building on Walnut Street is used only for deliveries, while a sign directs pedestrians to the main entrance at the rear of the building.

**Backs of buildings that face onto parking and other publicly accessible areas should be designed as a 'second front' and should include entrances signs and display windows whenever possible.**

**Along Walnut Street, doors facing the street should be open to pedestrians, even if as secondary entrances.**

*Sidewalks:* Incorporate walkways to allow pedestrians to move safely and comfortably between the parking lot and the building, and to connect individual entrances. Sidewalks can also be used to ensure barrier-free accessibility into rear entrances and to draw customers into stores.

*Signage:* Locate signs above, and relate them to, a specific door and/or window. Rear signs should not exceed 18" in height and may not exceed 50% of the maximum allowed area of the principal wall sign (See Section 3). Vivid colors and striking signage are particularly necessary to highlight store entrances from the parking lot. Service entrances, on the other hand, should be clearly marked but not emphasized.

*Windows:* A minimum of 25% of the linear frontage of the first floor rear facade should comprise doors and windows with transparent glass. Sill heights for any windows included in this calculation should not exceed 3 feet above street level. Tops of windows should be a minimum of 7 feet above the ground.

*Planting:* Provide plants in boxes or on trellises to enliven rear entrances. Consider locating planter boxes on either side of an entrance to create an air of formality. Seasonal plantings can add a special liveliness. Careful maintenance is required for all landscape materials.

*Awnings or canopies:* The use of awnings and canopies is strongly encouraged at the back entrances of buildings.

*Alleys:* These passages should be recognized as valuable pedestrian routes



Along Washington Street, by contrast, it is the rear facades of businesses which could be converted to assets. Present buildings accessed through Mica Lane should eventually develop facades oriented towards the right-of-way.

to and from stores and office buildings, and be furnished with lighting, planting and interesting wall surface treatment. Especially in cases where it is not practical to improve rear facades, alleys provide a crucial transition between parking lot and store front.



*This alley is too narrow to add trees or planters, but screening the dumpsters and providing a continuous path for pedestrians would improve it significantly.*

### Provide Screening around Dumpsters

Dumpsters should be located in parking lots behind buildings and should be screened from the lot, from the street, and from any adjacent residential areas.

### STEPS FOR IMPROVING THE BACK OF A BUILDING

#### Existing Conditions

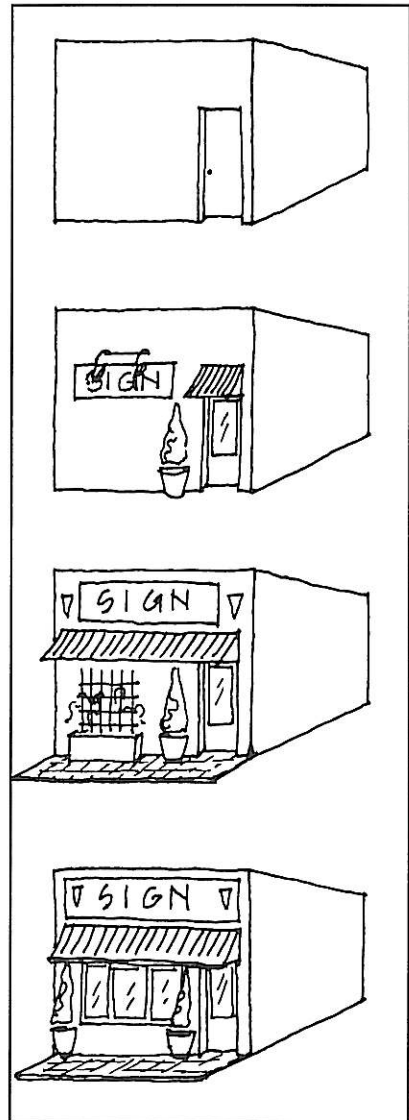
- Blank wall
- Solid door
- Bricked-up windows
- Unscreened dumpster
- Poor lighting/no lighting
- Poor signage/no signage

#### First Steps: Lower Cost Improvements

- New sign
- New awning
- Door with window
- Improved lighting at entrance
- Plants grouped around door

#### Major Improvements

- Large new sign
- New full width awning
- Improved lighting along wall
- Door with large window
- Major planting on trellis
- Open bricked-up windows
- Add sidewalk
- Add major storefront display area and import entrance



*Even small investments can greatly enhance rear facades. For some businesses, it may be feasible to turn their back doors into full-fledged entrances.*



## 2. STOREFRONTS

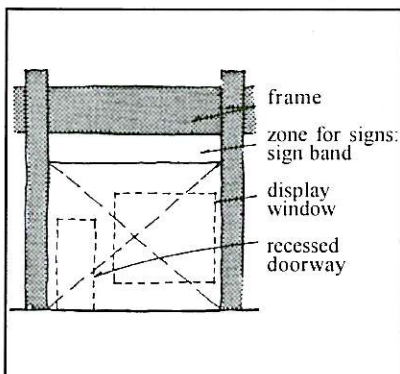
**Storefronts should be open and welcoming and establish an individual identity for the store.**

*The storefront and its frame are the key elements in the design of the first floor facade. They provide an opportunity to establish the individuality and character of each business by drawing attention to it and the goods or services it provides. Its careful design will bring a cohesive quality to the commercial area.*

### THE STOREFRONT FRAME

*The frame is the basic structural framework of the building, within which the storefront should be set. The frame usually includes a zone, or band, within which signs should be located.*

**Contain the storefront within a frame.**



*Elements of the storefront.*

- Use changes in color, materials or alignment to distinguish the storefront from the frame and establish an individual identity for each store.
- A storefront should be designed to fit inside a framed opening and not extend beyond it. To accentuate this sense of containment, a storefront can be set back slightly (6"-12") from the front surface of the building.
- Ensure that frame elements are the same color and texture throughout the building. Where masonry is used as the frame material it should be left unpainted except under special circumstances.

**In the case of a larger storefront, use a frame to create divisions within the storefront.**

- Divide larger storefronts into smaller sections to help assimilate larger commercial facades into the visual rhythm of Lower Falls' commercial architecture. Frame divisions which are too large disrupt that rhythm; divisions which are too small make good display difficult or impossible.
- In multiple storefront buildings, the frame should have a consistent finish.

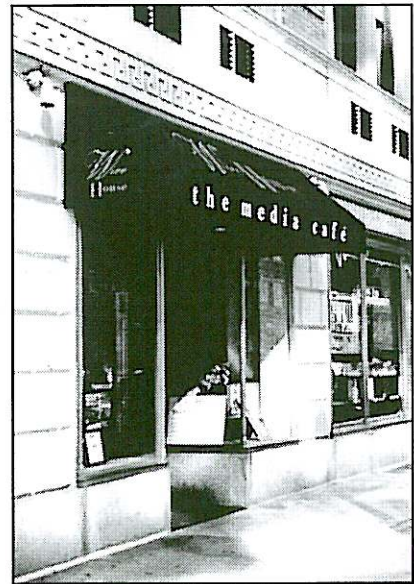
## STOREFRONT DISPLAY AREA

*The display area establishes the individual identity of the store.*

**Establish an individual identity for each storefront.**

**Doorways should be recessed, whereas windows should not.**

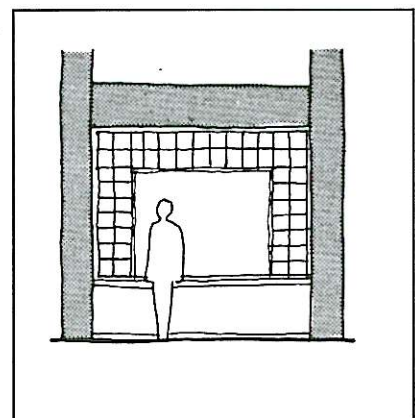
- *Window height:* The window sill should be no higher than 2 feet from the sidewalk and the top of the window should be no lower than 8 feet.
- *Window location:* Windows which are deeply recessed within the frame reduce the visibility of the storefront from the street. As mentioned previously, storefronts should not be recessed more than 6"-12".
- *Recessed doorways:* Inset doorways where possible. They add an attractive three-dimensional quality to the facade along the sidewalk and when combined with a well-designed storefront can enhance the visibility of window display by increasing angled views. In addition they ensure that outward-opening doors do not obstruct the sidewalk and interfere with pedestrians. Recessed doorway areas also provide an opportunity to include special paving at the entrance to the store. Doorway designs must provide barrier-free accessibility (refer to ADA requirements).



*In this storefront, the display windows are in the same plane as the rest of the facade, while the door is set back for ease of passage.*

**Provide large, transparent glass display windows; ensure that the pane pattern reveals, rather than conceals, the window display.**

- *Glazed Area:* As previously mentioned, a minimum of 70% of the linear frontage of the first floor facade should comprise doors and windows with transparent glass. Sill heights for any windows included in this calculation should not exceed two feet above sidewalk level. Tops of windows should be a minimum of eight feet above grade. At least 50% of the area of entrance doors should be glass.
- *Fenestration:* Avoid the use of very small glass panes at eye level which obscure the window display, unless the storefront is undergoing a historic rehabilitation where small panes originally existed. If small panes are desired, use in combination with large panes; place small panes at the top, sides and/or bottom of a window to frame an unrestricted view through the larger pane.
- *Interior lighting:* Window displays should be highlighted with strong incandescent light fixtures. The angle of their placement is critical to ensure that they spotlight the merchandise and do not either point toward the window shopper or cause distracting reflections on the storefront window.



*Small panes at the top and sides of display windows can lend a historic flavor without obscuring visibility.*



## WINDOW DISPLAY

*The power of a display window is its ability to attract the attention of passers-by: it needs to have a clear focus. Creative ideas include choosing a theme for the display or recognizing a special event, holiday, season or sale. Using display windows as stock space, covering them with paper advertisements, or filling them with everything sold in the store does not usually entice the shopper to come in. Highlight a minimal number of products and change displays frequently.*

**Window displays should be organized around clear themes, and changed frequently. Good lighting is imperative.**

*In this display, products are grouped to create eye-catching patterns.*



- *Merchandise display:* Use repetition for impact. Show multiple numbers of one product or show all products of the same color, etc. Use humor; try visual puns; put products in an unusual setting or with unusual props. For example, paint all the props the same color to make them look abstract. This will also make the featured product stand out.
- *Display base:* Use simple material for display base and backgrounds. For example, fabric wrapped tightly around homasote board and stapled to the back is inexpensive and easily changeable.
- *Visibility:* Create the visual focus of the display at eye level. Consider the size and amount of detail of merchandise to be displayed when deciding at what height to place it. If the display window has many small glass panes divided by mullions, ignore them. A good display, well lit, will allow passers-by to ignore all the small divisions in the window plane.
- Avoid attaching anything directly to the window glass, including signs telling customers you accept charge cards. Hang signs far

enough back from the glass so that they can be lit via the display lighting system. This will draw the shopper's eyes into your store...the first step to bringing them inside.

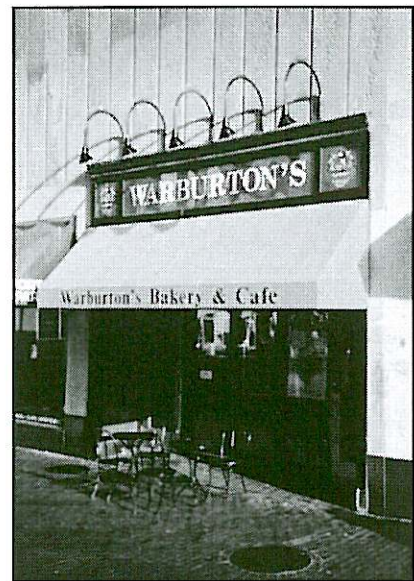
- *Lighting:* Strong, incandescent lights (preferably moveable) are necessary to highlight displays. Consider using low-voltage track lights. The initial cost is higher, but lamps give off less heat and use 2/3 less electricity to operate.

## AWNINGS

*Awnings are a traditional and relatively inexpensive way to embellish a storefront or building. They convey merchants' concerns for their buildings, their customers and their business districts. Awnings can provide a location for a sign or, in fact, become a sign. They also serve the practical functions of keeping the interior cooler, providing a shaded and sheltered place for the passerby, and protecting display windows from exposure to the sun.*

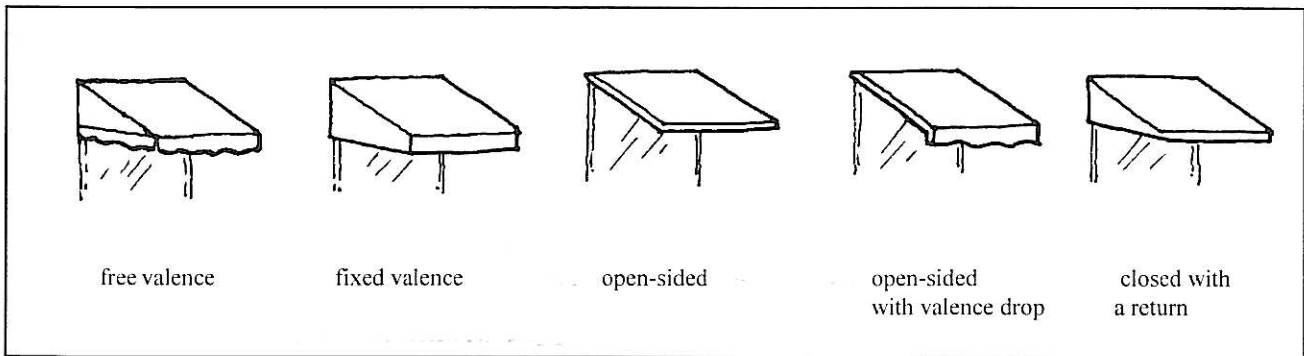
### **The use of awnings is encouraged.**

- *Location:* Awnings should not cover important architectural details. Usually older buildings were designed with a specific place to attach an awning including proper blocking to mount the frame securely, and often a protective hood or pocket to protect the awning in its retracted position. New awnings should be located in these positions wherever possible.
- *Type:* Retractable awnings look more traditional, allow for greater flexibility in responding to heat, light and the loads imposed by wind, rain and snow. They are also more easily protected at night. In parking areas, either fixed frame or retractable awnings may be used.
- *Style and Coordination:* Color and style should be coordinated with the storefront and the building facade. Use of a single awning for all stores within a multiple storefront building is discouraged. Awnings should be proportioned to suit the building to which they are attached. The vertical drop of an awning is a critical element in determining whether it will appear properly proportioned when installed. Too short a vertical drop will make the awning appear insignificant within its opening. Too long a drop will start to obscure a large portion of the display window, especially when viewed from afar.
- *Fabric:* Awning fabrics come in a variety of colors, patterns and finishes. Stripes or accent bands can easily be sewn to a solid color for a custom look. Fabric awning covers need to be replaced every two to three years, depending on color and fabric content. Internally illuminated, pre-formed awnings are discouraged.



*Awnings differentiate storefronts, while cooling both the sidewalk and the interior of the store.*





*There are a variety of awning types to choose from.*

## AIR CONDITIONERS

*The location of air conditioners requires careful attention to incorporate them into the building design. Air conditioners should not project from the storefront over the sidewalk or the store entrance where it is likely to drip on customers and detract from the visual appeal of the storefront.*

**Provide space for a recessed air conditioner where necessary, preferably located at the rear of the building, not visible from the street.**

## STOREFRONT MATERIALS

*Materials should reinforce the open and welcoming features of the storefront.*

**Use materials which are compatible with the character of the building and Lower Falls.**

- Solid panels below or above the window should be expressed as infill and set within the frame of the storefront.
- Framing members may be of metal, although wood is generally better since it allows for thinner framing members and more detail.
- Glass should be transparent, not reflective. Opaque or colored glass is only acceptable in unique circumstances.

## COLOR

*Color can be an important contributor to Lower Falls' character. While variety and experimentation with color schemes is not discouraged, they should respect the prevailing character of the village center.*

## **Use color to bring an additional dimension to the storefront.**

- Take cues from the architecture of the building; coordinate and integrate the colors selected for the storefronts with the overall color of the building. Limit the number of colors selected; use several shades of the same color or similar colors for a rich look.
- In a building with more than one storefront, shared elements should be painted the same color; for example, if there is a continuous sign band, it should be painted one color for its entire length. Piers and columns that are part of the building's architecture should also be the same color. With the exception of concrete block, natural masonry materials such as cast stone and brick should not be painted.
- Coordinate colors between neighboring stores. Separate storefronts within the same building do not have to be the same, but they should complement each other so that all elements of the building can reinforce one another.
- Bright or strong colors should generally be reserved for accents - on doors, to highlight interesting details, or in signs and graphics. Too many colors, or colors that might clash, can detract from the desired effect and obscure the underlying character of the building's architecture.

## **LIGHTING**

*The exterior lighting scheme is important to the success of storefront design. Lighting which highlights the sign and display area is often more effective than general lighting of the entire store. When a larger building has a number of storefronts, exterior lighting should be coordinated since different light sources have different colors. Ensure that recessed entries are well lit for safety and visibility.*

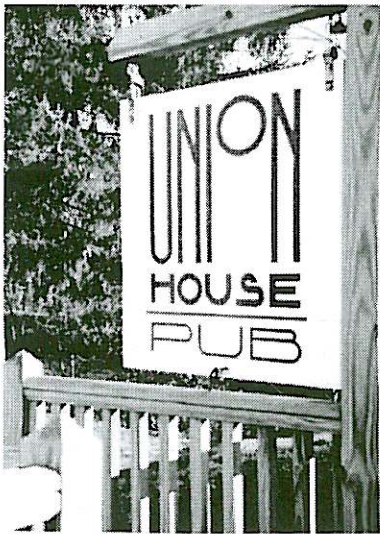
**Storefront lighting should specifically highlight the main signage and the window display.**

## **3. SIGNAGE**

*Signs should be designed to present a clear message about the business they serve. With careful consideration and quality design, signs can add a new level of visual refinement to the streetscape. Signs are also one of the least expensive and most effective ways to enhance a storefront.*

*Signs must be carefully considered in relation to neighboring signs and the facades of the buildings in Lower Falls as a whole. Signs for a row of storefronts in the same building should all be of similar size,*





*Well-designed signs give a memorable identity to a business and invite customers.*

*material and proportion. They should all be located similarly on the building. While it is not necessary for such signs to be all the same color or design, they should look like a family - in this way they reinforce, rather than compete with, each other.*

*The sign alone should not attempt to convey the entire story a merchant wants to relay. Too many different signs can overwhelm viewers. The end result is that none of the intended messages are conveyed. It is the careful combination of sign, building storefront and window display working together that has the greatest impact.*

*There are four basic types of signs: wall, projecting, window and free standing. The use of these signs depends upon their context within Lower Falls. Within the commercial core, and on the backs of buildings facing parking lots, wall and window signs are appropriate to use. At the edge of the commercial area along the west end of Washington Street and the south end of River Street, freestanding signs can be used for buildings of a more residential character. Different guidelines apply to each category of sign. Below are guidelines for wall, projecting, and window signs.*

**All provisions of Wellesley's Zoning Bylaw under SECTION XXII.A SIGNS AND IDENTIFICATION DEVICES are applicable to this section.**

*Signage should be an integral part of the design of the building and needs to be considered from the outset. Signage may change several times over the life of the building and this needs to be taken into consideration.*

**Include a zone for signs on the building, within which each storefront can have an individual identity.**

Provide a sign band on the front facade, typical of older commercial buildings. The sign band can be defined by a change in facade color and/or material or a change in relief on the facade without altering material or color. Articulation or division of the sign band may be used so that each section clearly relates to an individual store.



*Window signs range from the classical to the bold.*

**Signs should be compatible with the building, neighboring buildings and the character of Lower Falls as a whole. Signs should be carefully located within the sign band where one exists to avoid obscuring important architectural features.**

- Align the tops and bottoms of wall signs with other signs on the building. Locate signs within the sign band where one exists.
- In buildings with multiple storefronts, coordinate the approach to signage throughout the building. Use signs of similar size, proportion and materials for each store. Varying the color of individual signs adds variety. Even good individual signs can, when poorly

coordinated with signs for other stores in the building, detract from the character of the commercial area.

- Consistently use signs with either light letters on a dark background or dark letters on a light background throughout a building. The former generally gives the greatest emphasis to the words.



*The sign band on this building is created by hanging identically shaped signboards from the storefront frame.*

## WALL SIGNS

*Of all the types of signs, wall signs need to be seen from furthest away and should contain simple information such as the name of the store and the type of business.*

**Use the wall sign as the primary business sign. It is viewed from furthest away, often from across the street, and should be legible from that distance. Wall signs should be carefully sized to fit in with the building's facade design and should avoid obscuring important architectural features.**

*Types of signs:* Board signs use a background board, generally rectangular in shape, which contains the letters, graphic image and logo, where applicable. Individual letters mounted directly on a building can also create appealing signs. Neon signs as the major wall sign are discouraged.

*Size and placement:* The size of a wall sign depends on the width of the street as well as the size of the business. Locate the sign within the sign band where it exists. Do not cover up important architectural details such as cornices, piers and other elements. The top of the sign should not exceed the underside of the sills of the upper level windows, the lowest portion of the roof, or the top of the parapet in the case of single story buildings with parapets - whichever is lowest. Box signs with a white background are usually dull during the daytime and glaringly bright at night and thus are not very readable. If an internally illuminated box sign is required, it should have lightly colored letters on an opaque background for greatest legibility.

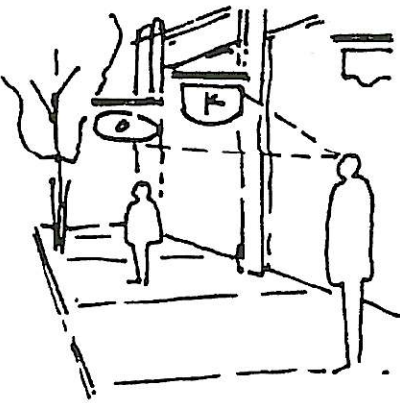


*Lettering:* Signs on main facades should generally use letters which range from 8" to 14" high. Smaller letters for smaller stores and larger letters for larger stores are recommended. Internally illuminated individual letters are not encouraged.

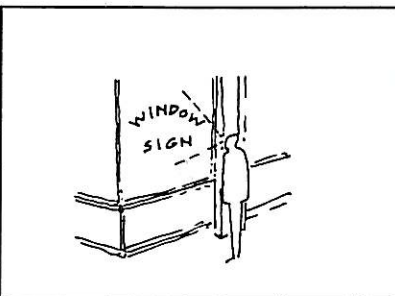
## PROJECTING SIGNS



*Projecting signs are most distinctive when their shape reflects the nature of the business.*



*Projecting signs should be spaced far enough apart not to obscure each other.*



*Lettering in window signs should fit within the average person's line of vision.*

*High quality projecting signs can add a special character to the streetscape. These signs should be small and unique in character. Projecting signs are seen from a closer distance than wall signs. They are viewed from medium/short range - especially by pedestrians on the sidewalk.*

**Use projecting signs where appropriate in order to complement the storefront and to catch pedestrians' attention as they walk along the street.**

- (i) *Types of signs:* Often, a three-dimensional object or special shape makes the most impressive projecting sign. Merchants can use these signs to express what is unique about their merchandise or their business - for example, a hammer-shaped sign for a hardware store, or an eyeglasses-shaped sign for an optometrist. Projecting signs are not, usually, considered the predominate sign for any business. Internally illuminated projecting sign boxes tend to look heavy and are strongly discouraged.
- (ii) *Size and location:* Projecting signs should not project more than four feet perpendicular to the wall to which it is attached, provided that the sign does not project into, on, or over a public sidewalk, street or way [Town of Wellesley Zoning Bylaw, Section XXIIA.C.10].
- (iii) *Lettering:* Letters should be 4" to 10" high.
- (iv) *Special concerns:* The information on a projecting sign need not duplicate the information on the wall sign - it should augment the primary sign, describing the business in a different, more visual way. The design should be carefully coordinated with the building, the storefront and the design of the primary wall sign. The bracket from which the sign hangs is part of the overall sign design. If several stores within a building are to have projecting signs, their design and placement should be considered together and in general they should be hung at the same height.

## WINDOW SIGNS

*Window signs are seen at a short range - from in front of the store.*

**Use window signs to provide more detailed information and to complement the window display. Signs painted on storefront glass are a traditional and effective way to present this information.**



*Types of signs:* Lettering may be hand painted directly on glass, etched in the glass or applied with vinyl, die-cut letters. White, light colors or gold leaf are most legible for graphics on glass. Paper signs taped to glass never look good; temporary signs should be hung about one foot behind the glass, fixed to a rigid backing board and highlighted with display spot lights. Neon signs are allowed, but work best if they occupy a minimum amount of the display window.

*Size and location:* Signs painted on second floor windows are seen from a greater distance than those on first floor windows, and the letter size and amount of information must be adjusted accordingly. Lettering on first floor windows should cover no more than 20% of the glass area. Lettering on second floor windows should cover no more than 25% of the glass area.

*Lettering:* The size of the lettering may vary from ½" to 8". The amount of information to convey, the importance of the information, the design of the display area and the design of the store front should all be considered in determining the height of the letters.



*Window signs are often used to give a store an old-fashioned accent..*

## MATERIALS

*Wood:* Wood can be used for backing or lettering. Wood is particularly useful for a sign that has carved, recessed or dimensional lettering or decoration. Use wood that allows the grain to contribute to the design. Large pieces of wood can crack or check as they age; exterior plywood, (with protected edges) can help solve this problem.



*Metal can give signs a striking texture.*

*Metal:* Metal can be used for backing or lettering. Copper, bronze, brass and stainless steel offer richness and durability. Gold and silver leaf, properly applied, can last for fifty years or more.

*Glass:* The transparency of glass allows graphics or lettering painted on its surface to float in place while also allowing a view beyond. Glass can be etched or sand-blasted and lit from the bottom edge for dramatic effects. Glass may also be entirely back-painted with a solid color after lettering has been applied.

*Plastic:* This is likely to be most successful when used for individual letters. In large amounts, plastic can look flimsy and cheap. If used as a



backing, it must be made rigid, or it can be placed in a frame. Vacuum-formed plastic faces in metal frames are generally inappropriate.

## COLORS

*Coordination:* Coordinate sign and building colors so that the entire face of the building works together to look attractive and draw attention. Too many colors used together on a sign ( or on adjacent signs) tend to overwhelm the viewer. The Wellesley Bylaw limits sign colors to two, including black and white.

*Contrast:* Make sure that there is enough contrast between lettering and background colors. In general, lighter letters on a dark background are more legible than dark letters on a light background. This applies to signage on glass or on board backing. If a building contains a number of shops, it is best if all signs have dark backgrounds and light letters or, light backgrounds and dark letters. Lack of this basic uniformity destroys the rhythm of a building's facade.

*This simple building looks elegant because of the large clear window area and the coordination of materials and colors between the facade and the sign.*



## LIGHTING

*Well-lit signs are particularly important for stores that stay open at night. Properly angled, bright lighting in display windows is also effective. Illuminated signs attract attention after-hours and lend a warmth to a business district. Exterior lights can be controlled by timers or photo-electric cells. A full understanding of the lighting options for signage can help discourage the use of internally illuminated sign boxes.*

*Incandescent light:* Usually spots or flood lights attached to the building facade and spaced at intervals can illuminate the full area of a sign. There are a variety of exterior fixtures that can be used as a decorative element - from this with neutral, small housings to elaborate, fluted,

gooseneck fixtures.

*Fluorescent light:* Properly shielded with hoods, a series of fluorescent fixtures can more uniformly light signs than incandescent spots. They are typically cooler in color, but new tube types can closely match the quality and color range of incandescent lights, which many people still prefer. Fluorescent fixtures typically look more utilitarian than incandescent ones and blend less easily with historic building facades; therefore, the provision of a valence to conceal the fixture is appropriate.

*Backlit signs or letters:* Micro-fluorescent tubes or neon behind solid letters or signs can provide a pleasant glow around an establishment's name.

#### General Notes:

If a building has a series of storefronts, the lighting for their signs should be coordinated. If all storefronts have signs lit externally with hooded fluorescent lights, for example, all the lamp colors should be the same - all warm white, all cool white, etc.

Although up-lighting signs from below is dramatic and allows fixtures to be more easily hidden, mounting fixtures above signs and lighting down avoids many weather and water-related problems.

Bare bulbs should be avoided on most buildings. Glare from unshielded lights makes adjacent signs or displays difficult to see.

Overly bright signs, especially at night, can actually cause passers-by to look away rather than read them.

## MAINTENANCE

**Maintenance of buildings, signs, storefronts, landscaping and parking areas plays a central role in defining the character of Lower Falls.**

*While these guidelines set out objectives for design, effective long-term maintenance will ensure that improvements, once made, remain a permanent feature of the center. Regular maintenance of buildings and landscape elements will ensure long-term savings through the avoidance of costly repairs. Regular repainting, for example, preserves a building from more costly repairs which may be necessary if it is delayed excessively. In addition, a new coat of paint can add a noticeable freshness to a building and so contribute to the area as a whole.*

*Dumpster areas, awnings and signs require frequent maintenance. Maintenance of plants is also particularly important to ensure their continued health.*



Property owners and store owners are strongly encouraged to step back and review their property every six months with this checklist in hand.

Is any paint peeling or faded?

Has the window display been redone recently?

Is the glass clean?

Is the primary sign faded or dated?

Is there any window advertising that is out of date?

Is the awning in one piece? Is it faded or frayed?

Does the exterior lighting work?

Is there any rusted metal that should be treated?

Is the dumpster enclosure clean? Painted?

Are there trees, plants, planters that need pruning, fertilizing, or replanting?

Are there other changes that would enliven the storefront and make it more inviting?

In short, does the building or store, front and back, still convey the image of a successful business that is proud of what it offers and wants to attract customers?





## VII. Planning Proposals

The following proposals are offered as visions of what could happen at the heart of Lower Falls. Versions of these proposals have previously been presented and discussed at the Economic Roundtable, at the October public meeting and at the November breakfast meeting.

The common thread among these proposals is the goal of improving the function and attractiveness of Lower Falls and realizing its potential as a vibrant village center.

### A. Town Green

Lower Falls needs a focal point: a space that defines the center, draws attention visually and socially, and offers a meeting ground of activity for all generations. The bend in Washington Street, where the railroad right-of-way begins, lends itself to the creation of a town Green. A Green would be highly visible from both east and west directions, to drivers as well as to pedestrians, and would be equidistant from the different sources of users of Lower Falls: retail shoppers, office employees, residents and visitors. Because of the connection to the right-of-way where a bikeway and pedestrian path could be developed, it could serve as a point of origin and destination for bicyclists and strollers.

#### **Connections to right-of-way and future redevelopment of 27 Washington Street**

The two options presented are linked to and illustrated with the other proposals for a reuse of the railroad right-of-way, a redesign of Mica Lane, and possible siting options for an assisted living housing development at 27 Washington Street, should the property owners consider using the Residential Incentive Overlay.

The dimensions, design and furnishings of the Town Green would still have to be developed in more detail: a great number of variations is possible. The two options we present occupy the front lot of 27 Washington where the present zoning boundary divides the Business A district along Washington Street from the Industrial A district on the rest of the site.

This site is entirely private and is highly valuable because of the commercial uses it could support. A conservation easement could be negotiated between the Town and the property owners in exchange for tax abatements, or the Town could consider acquisition. In either case, these proposals are meant to generate more ideas on how to incorporate a public space onto a private site in a way that is economically feasible for the owners.

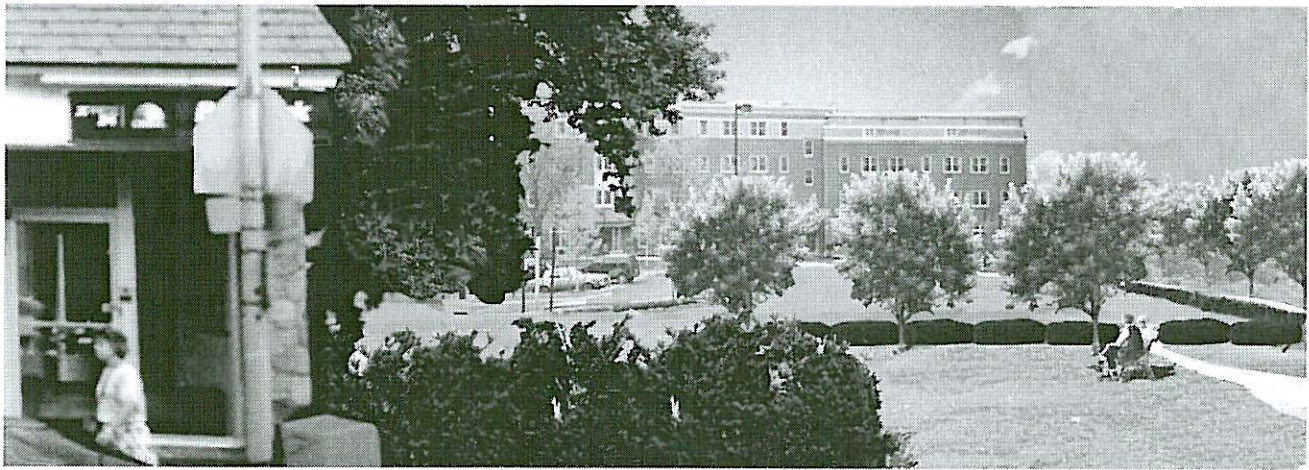
#### **Retail on the Green**

The two options differ only in the absence (Option 1) or inclusion (Option 2) of a one-story retail building at the rear of the Town Green. Possible uses for this building are a café or sandwich shop with outdoor seating on the Green, an ice cream parlor, a bike repair shop, a bookstore, or other uses viable at a small scale. The building would have parking in the rear, accessible through the right-of-way, redesigned to accommodate public circulation. The retail building would animate the Green with pedestrian activity, continue the retail function of Washington Street, divide the Green from other uses on the rest of the site, and add value to the site.

## Pedestrian Plaza

The two options have in common a small plaza at the corner of the right-of-way. This space would be surfaced with distinctive paving, landscaped at its edges for enclosure, and furnished with benches, tables, bike racks and an information kiosk. This plaza could also be moved further away from Washington Street and attached to the retail building, where it could adjoin outdoor cafes and play areas for children. The rest of the Green would be a simple expanse of grass, crisscrossed by pedestrian paths, and landscaped at its edges with shade trees.

The Town Green would thus provide a mini-park at the heart of Lower Falls, a visual focal point for the small-scale uses of Washington Street, a central node in a network of pedestrian and bike paths, and an urban complement to nearby riverfront parks.



*View of the former Grossman's site, with the present bank building to the left, redeveloped into an assisted living housing development and Town Green.*



## B. Right-Of-Way and Mica Lane Options

The railroad right-of-way offers two significant opportunities for improving the heart of Lower Falls:

- 1) provide a foot path and bikeway from Washington Street to the Newton side of the Charles River, and
- 2) resolve traffic and parking problems associated with the landlocked Mica Lane properties.

For the purposes of these proposals, we have included in the definition of “Mica Lane properties” both the 5 and 15 Washington Street buildings, since their parking access is through Mica Lane.

The primary purpose of reopening the right-of-way should be to provide a bikeway from Washington Street to the Charles River, and to rebuild the bridge trestle to continue the bikeway to the Newton side of Lower Falls. This bikeway, combined with a pedestrian path, has long been advocated by Lower Falls residents as a desirable amenity to pursue on public land.

The right-of-way’s width of 43', even as it bulges to 45' along its central portion, is not sufficient to simultaneously accommodate a dedicated bike lane, a dedicated pedestrian path, a separate public way for car circulation, and parking. Combinations of these are possible in many permutations. We offer two options that combine the bike lane with the public way, under the assumption that the public way, not being a through-way, would not carry as much traffic as a regular street. We have opted to explore the parking potential of the right-of-way because the lack of parking for the Mica Lane properties is the most significant obstacle to either increasing their rents as office space, or to redeveloping into retail uses, and directly contributes to the traffic congestion of Lower Falls.

### **Right-of-way Option 1: maximum parking**

Option 1 maximizes the parking potential of the right-of-way while still maintaining a bikeway. Perpendicular parking is provided in the middle third of the way (where the width is 45') and parallel parking along the rest. A 6' sidewalk along the edge of the Mica Lane buildings is separated from a 24' public way by a 4' landscaped buffer. Where parking is perpendicular, the sidewalk is reduced to a width of 3' over a distance of approximately 170', a compromise solution mitigated by the insertion of planting beds through the parking spaces.<sup>1</sup>

A total of 31 parking spaces in the right-of-way is provided through this option.

### **Right-of-way Option 2: continuous landscaped walkway**

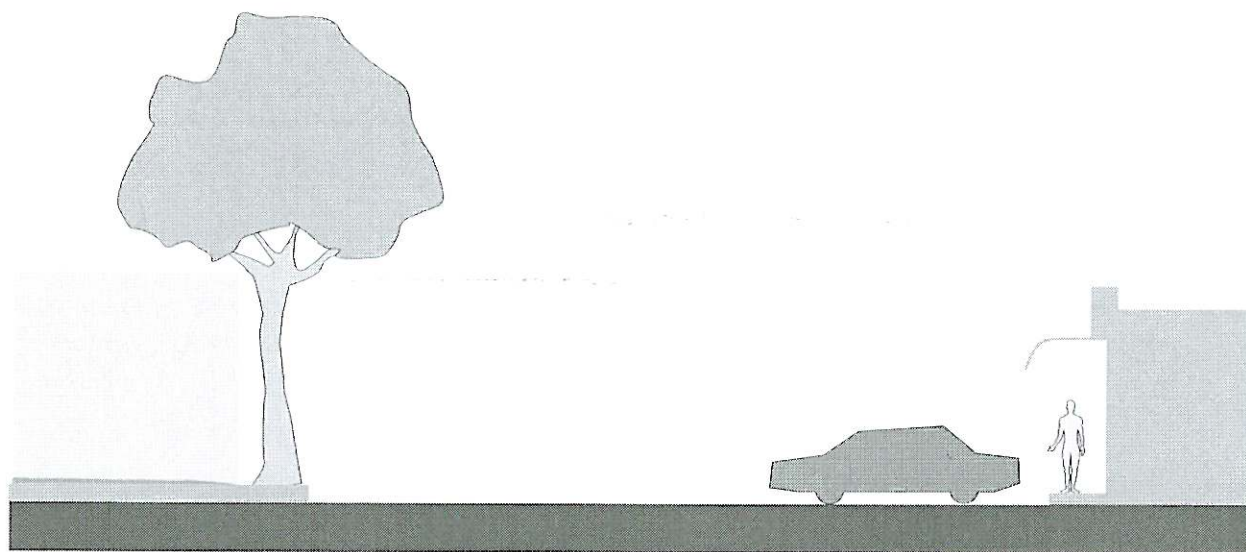
Option 2 allows for parallel parking only, preserving a continuous 6' sidewalk along the building edge and the 4' landscape buffer between the sidewalk and public way. The width of the sidewalk and buffer are combined for the construction of a treeway to support street trees.

A total of 21 parking spaces in the right-of-way is provided through this option.

### **Common features:**

- **bikeway shared with public way**
- **Mica Lane closed at Washington Street**
- **ramp connection at 27 Mica Lane**

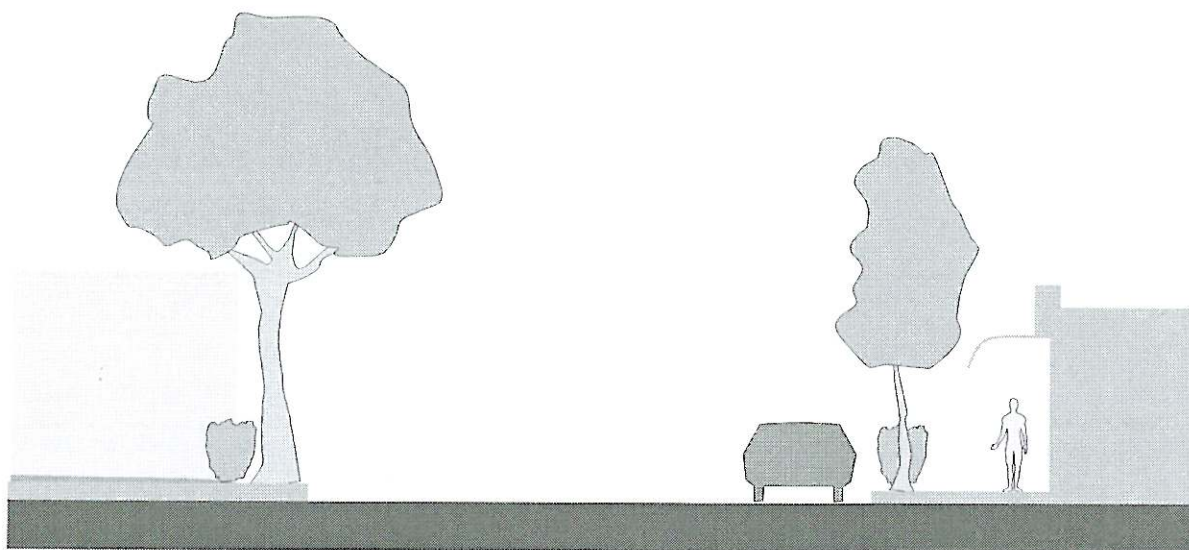
<sup>1</sup> This condition of parking spaces less than 5' from a building, is not allowed under Wellesley’s Zoning Bylaw at SECTION XXI. OFF-STREET PARKING. Subpart 3. Development Standards. Design. f. This design is shown only to illustrate the constraints of maximizing parking along the right-of-way. The removal of the bikeway would not alter these constraints.



TOWN GREEN

S  
A

Unrecommended Perpendicular Parkin



POSSIBLE EXPANSION OF  
LANDSCAPE BUFFER ON  
ADJACENT SITE

Preferred Parallel Parking Shown On Options 1 and

Sections Through the Right-of-Way at the Town Green



Both Option 1 and 2 show the bikeway shared with a 24' wide public way. This new street through the right-of-way gives vehicular access to both the 27 Washington Street site and to the Mica Lane properties. This allows the current Mica Lane to be closed at its Washington Street end, eliminating the traffic hazards associated with entering and exiting a narrow blind alley from and to a busy street. The two current curb-cuts from Washington Street to the west and east sides of the front of the 27 Washington Street site may not have to be reopened. The single access from the right-of-way to both east and west sites thus reduces curb-cuts from four to one along this short portion of north Washington Street.

#### **Mica Lane Option 1: keeping existing buildings**

The redesigned access to Mica Lane properties forms a loop from the right-of-way to a 160' ramp (in two sections of 80', wide enough to include parking) built behind 27 Mica Lane, which bridges the 8' drop in elevation between the right-of-way and the parking area of 27 Washington Street, and reconnects to the right-of-way between 12 Mica Lane and 15 Washington Street.

Coupled with the right-of-way Option 1, a total of 128 parking spaces for the Mica Lane properties (including 5 and 15 Washington Street) is provided through this access configuration.

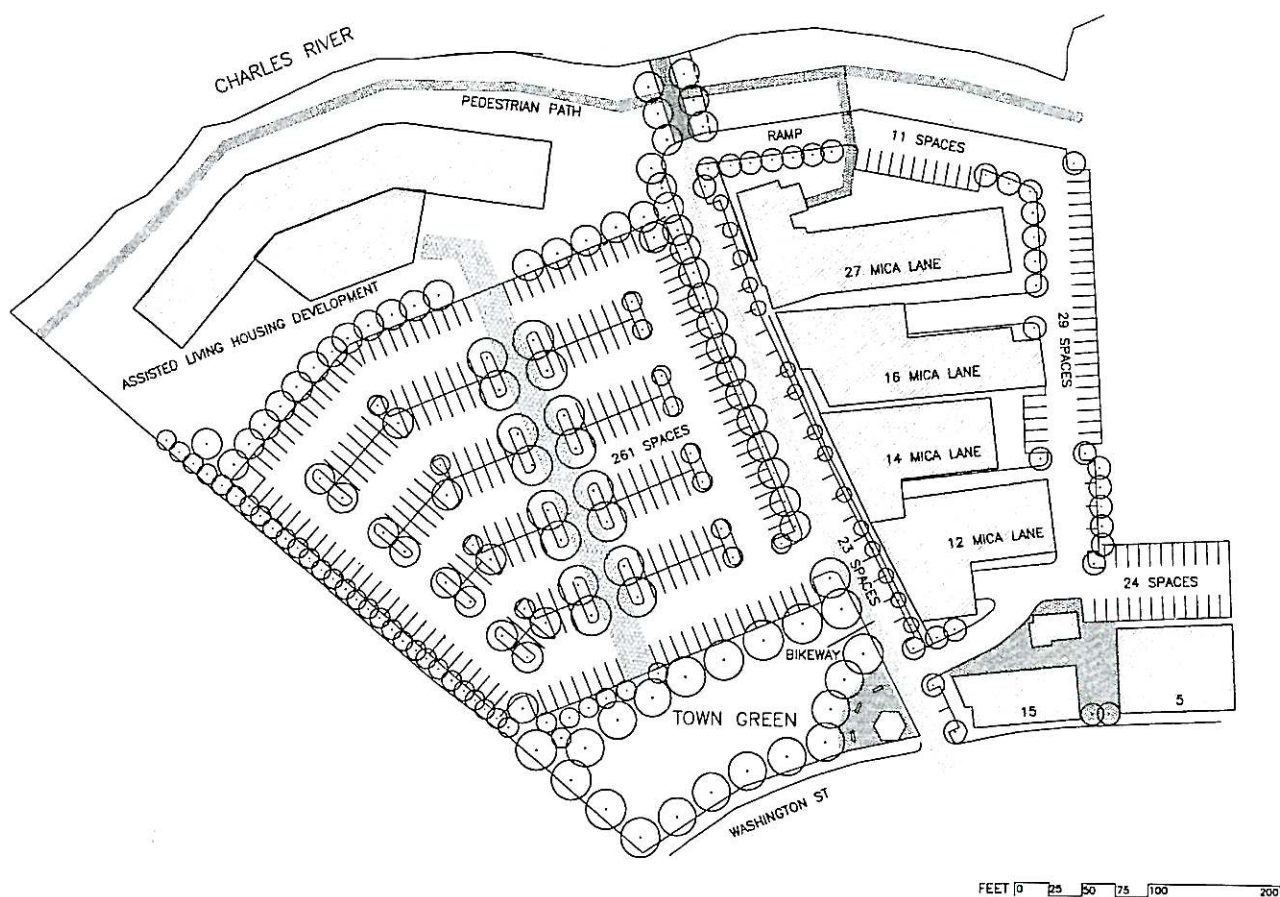
#### **Mica Lane Option 2: consolidating two properties**

Under Option 2, 16 Mica Lane is converted to parking, both to augment the overall supply, and to separate 27 Mica Lane from the other properties should the owners decide to redevelop the building into residential uses under the Residential Incentive Overlay district.

Coupled with the right-of-way Option 2, this new parking of 40 spaces is added to the supply of Mica Lane parking, for a total of 159 spaces.

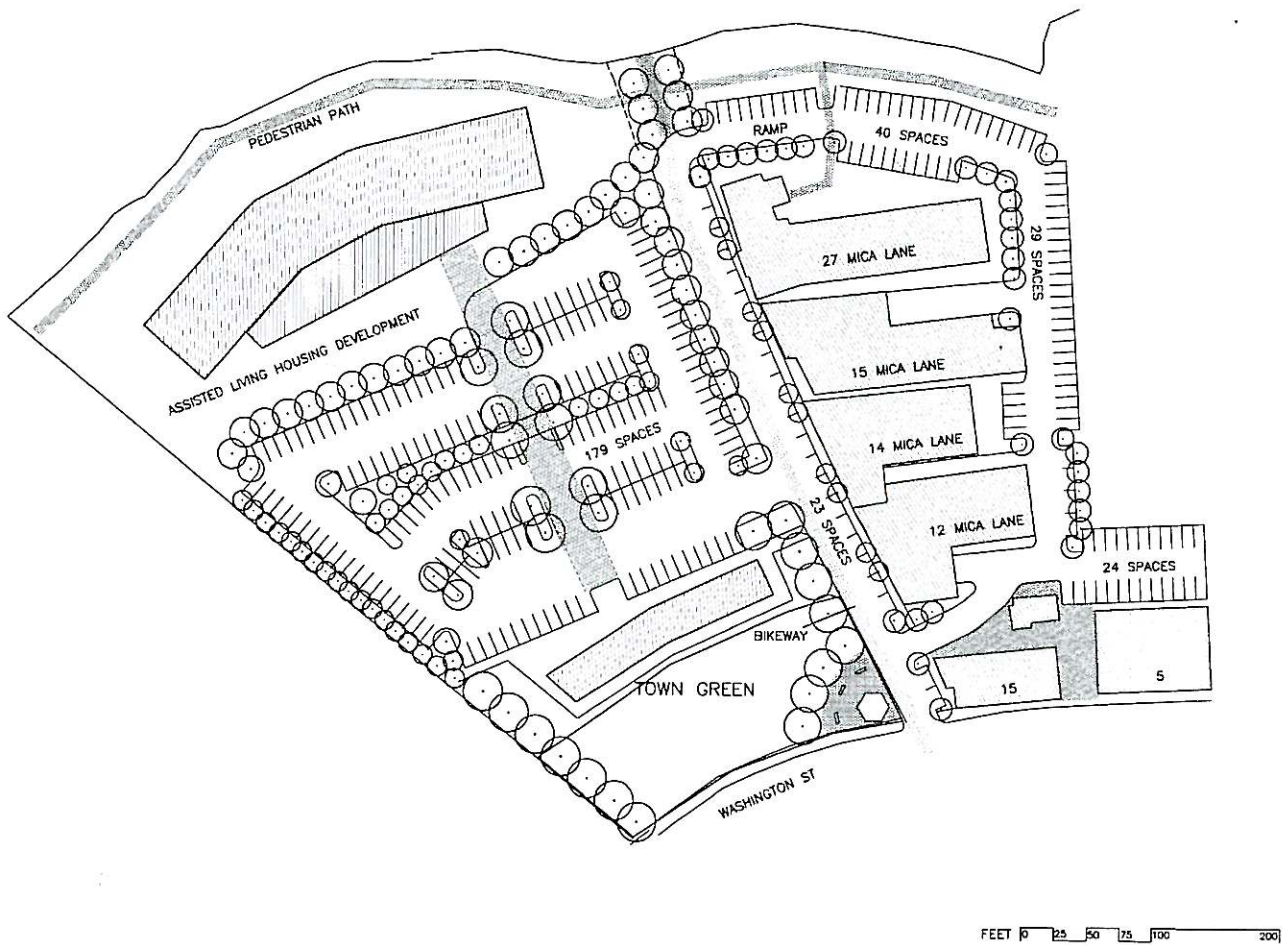
#### **Parking study**

These proposals need to be tested against a traffic and parking study of current and projected needs of central Lower Falls which hinge on a resolution of the redevelopment of 27 Washington Street. In the following section, we show two possible options for a long-term redevelopment future: the reuse of the former Grossman's site into an assisted living housing development.



Town Green, Right-Of-Way, Mica Lane and Assisted Living Housing  
Option 1





Town Green, Right-Of-Way, Mica Lane, Assisted Living Housing, and Retail  
Option 2

## C. Assisted Living Options

To illustrate possible futures under the proposed Residential Incentive Overlay District, we show two options for an assisted living housing development: one of 100 units and the other of 120 units, with similar massing and siting along the River. Other uses possible under the RIO are independent elderly and conventional multi-family housing developments. All have the benefit of causing significantly lower traffic impacts on the commercial center and surrounding neighborhoods of Lower Falls than large retail or office uses, and of requiring less parking spaces than other uses. Above all, the benefit of developing housing in the RIO is to reclaim riverfront property for uses that would be oriented towards the river, physically and functionally, be compatible with continuous public access and recreation along the river, and provide a resident population to support Lower Falls' commercial center, enliven its public spaces and strengthen its pedestrian character.

### Model

The floor area calculations for both options are based on the nearby 90-unit Heritage-on-the-Falls assisted living housing development, built on Washington Street in Newton, on the former Shipley property. The units are 430 square feet in area, and the distribution of spaces is of 54% for housing, 19% for common areas, 17% for circulation, and the remaining 10% for general services and administration. Any new housing development on the Wellesley site would be designed to accommodate different site constraints, operational demands and design requirements, and could vary substantially from this model. The purpose of using a model was to test the fit of an existing, recently designed facility on the Lower Falls site.

### Option 1: 100 units

Option 1 features 100 units of a floor design wider than deep, to maximize window openings. The building is 4 stories in height or 45', set back 60' from the residential properties of Columbia Street, and from 40' to 60' from the Charles River. The common areas reach through from the front towards Washington Street to the rear along the River. Dining rooms and outdoor terraces would be oriented towards the River, while medical, personal, and administrative services would be grouped at the front. A paved path, distinct from the parking area, connects the entrance of the housing development to the Town Green. An alternative path could be along the western edge of the site, next the right-of-way. A pedestrian path along the River runs parallel to the property and connects with the footpath and bikeway bridge over the Charles.

At a ratio of .65 spaces per unit, the development needs 65 dedicated parking spaces. More parking (145 spaces) is provided on the rest of the site to service the Mica Lane properties should they be converted to retail uses oriented towards the right-of-way. A total of 210 parking spaces is thus provided on site.

Added to Option 1 for the right-of-way and Option 1 for Mica Lane, the total parking provided on the site of the assisted living development provides all but 16 of the parking spaces needed under the zoning requirement of 3.2 spaces per 1,000 square feet of either retail or office space for all of the Mica Lane properties, including 5 and 15 Washington Street (see Parking Comparisons table on page 70).

### Option 2: 120 units

Option 2 features 120 units of deeper than wide units to maximize space efficiency and minimize the spreading of the footprint. As in Option 1, the building is 4 stories or 45' in height, with the same side and rear setbacks. The siting of both options is very similar, close to the River, with wings embracing a central core of common areas, which also runs through from front to back. The footprint of Option 2 is wider, reflecting deeper units, but more units on each floor keep the footprint compact. The wide pedestrian path through the landscaped parking area connects the entrance of the housing development to the retail building on the Town



Green, while a riverfront footpath at the rear connects with the bikeway at the bridge.

The housing development needs 78 parking spaces, the retail building 18. A total of 180 spaces is provided on site. The difference, 84 spaces, is again offered to supply the parking needs of the Mica Lane properties, either for retail or office uses.

Added to Option 2 for the right-of-way and Option 2 for Mica Lane, the total parking provided on the site of the assisted living development yields a surplus of 7 spaces over the parking needed under the zoning requirement of 3.2 spaces per 1,000 square feet for all of the Mica Lane properties, including 5 and 15 Washington Street, but without 16 Mica Lane.

#### **Common features**

- **building located close to the river**
- **common areas oriented towards the river**
- **riverfront pedestrian path connecting to bikeway and bridge over Charles**
- **access to property through right-of-way**
- **housing connected to Town Green**
- **more parking than needed for housing developed on rest of site to support surrounding small-scale retail, existing and future**

#### **Alternatives**

Many design alternatives are possible. One would be to develop a housing development of 150 units as the allowed maximum under the Residential Incentive Overlay District and to restrict the amount of parking supplied on site to the housing development needs alone (98). As these proposals show, the site could easily support the expanded footprint, particularly as a longer wing along the right-of-way, while keeping the building at 4 stories or 45' and maintaining the same side and rear setbacks. The higher number of units would increase the value of the site while restricted parking would allow for more green space to add to its amenities.

Other alternatives could reduce the size of the Town Green, while keeping its function, and allow more retail at its edge. This would again increase the value of the redevelopment while maintaining the village character of Lower Falls oriented towards small-scale retail.

These alternatives rely on the requirement that the parking needs of Mica Lane properties be met elsewhere in Lower Falls than through the use of the public right-of-way or the property at 27 Washington Street. The following section presents some options for meeting the parking needs of current and future retail uses of Lower Falls.

**Parking Comparisons Between Current Conditions and Options 1 and 2 For Right-Of-Way, Mica Lane, and Assisted Living Housing Development**

**Option 1**

	<b>Current</b>	<b>Required By Current Zoning (3.2 spaces/1000 SF of structure)</b>	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>Proposed Right- of -way and Mica Lane - Option 1</b>
Mica Lane	102	242	-140	63
15 Washington	7	26	-19	total
5 Washington	15	21	-6	24
Total	124	289	-165	87 (-202 deficit)

**Option 2**

	<b>Current</b>	<b>Required By Current Zoning</b>	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>Proposed Right- of-way and Mica Lane - Option 2</b>
Mica Lane	102	242	-140	92
15 Washington	7	26	-19	total
5 Washington	15	21	-6	24
Total	124	289	-165	116 (-173 deficit)

**Assisted Living Options**

	<b>Required (.65 spaces/unit)</b>	<b>Provided On Site</b>	<b>Available For Mica Lane</b>
Assisted Living 1 (100 units)	65	261	196
Assisted Living 2 (120 units) including retail	96 (18 retail, 78 for housing complex)	179	83



## D. Municipal Parking Options

For Lower Falls to maintain a pedestrian character, and to support existing and future small-scale retail uses, it needs more parking behind street edge buildings. A greater supply of municipal parking in particular would enable the customer base of retail uses to expand. Three possibilities present themselves to increase the supply of customer parking in Lower Falls:

- 1) developing cooperative agreements among property owners for sharing existing parking lots;
- 2) increasing the capacity of the municipal parking lot by adding a deck and lower level;
- 3) building a municipal parking garage in the center of Lower Falls, behind existing buildings.

### **Cooperative Agreements for shared parking**

The first approach to explore is for property owners of large parking lots, such as of One Washington Street and 34 through 44 Washington Street, to develop cooperative parking arrangements with smaller business owners, such that parking could be shared during the day, or office lots could be opened after hours for retail uses. The parking lot of One Washington Street, offers a logical opportunity for such agreements. It is adjacent to the congested Mica Lane properties and currently has a surplus of 12 parking spaces over that required under zoning. Beyond the parking needs of the office employees of that building, however, the customer base of the professional offices includes clients of short-term medical appointments for which flexibility, in the form of empty spaces at all times, is needed. Furthermore, the owner of the property has been so far reluctant to entertain ideas of cooperative agreements. Evening and week-end uses of this lot, for retail customers of restaurants for example, or for the use of a canoe launch at the point where the site is level with the Charles River, present liability issues which have to be resolved.

The parking lots behind the office buildings of 34 through 44 Washington Street currently have a deficit of 105 parking spaces. Daytime needs would have to be met before cooperative arrangements could be contemplated, while evening and week-end use by the public presents the same liability concerns as for other private owners.

While these strategies should be thoroughly explored in the short-term, another approach is to recognize the shortage of parking in all of Lower Falls, particularly in light of a desired growth of small-scale retail uses in the future, and to increase the supply of municipal parking.

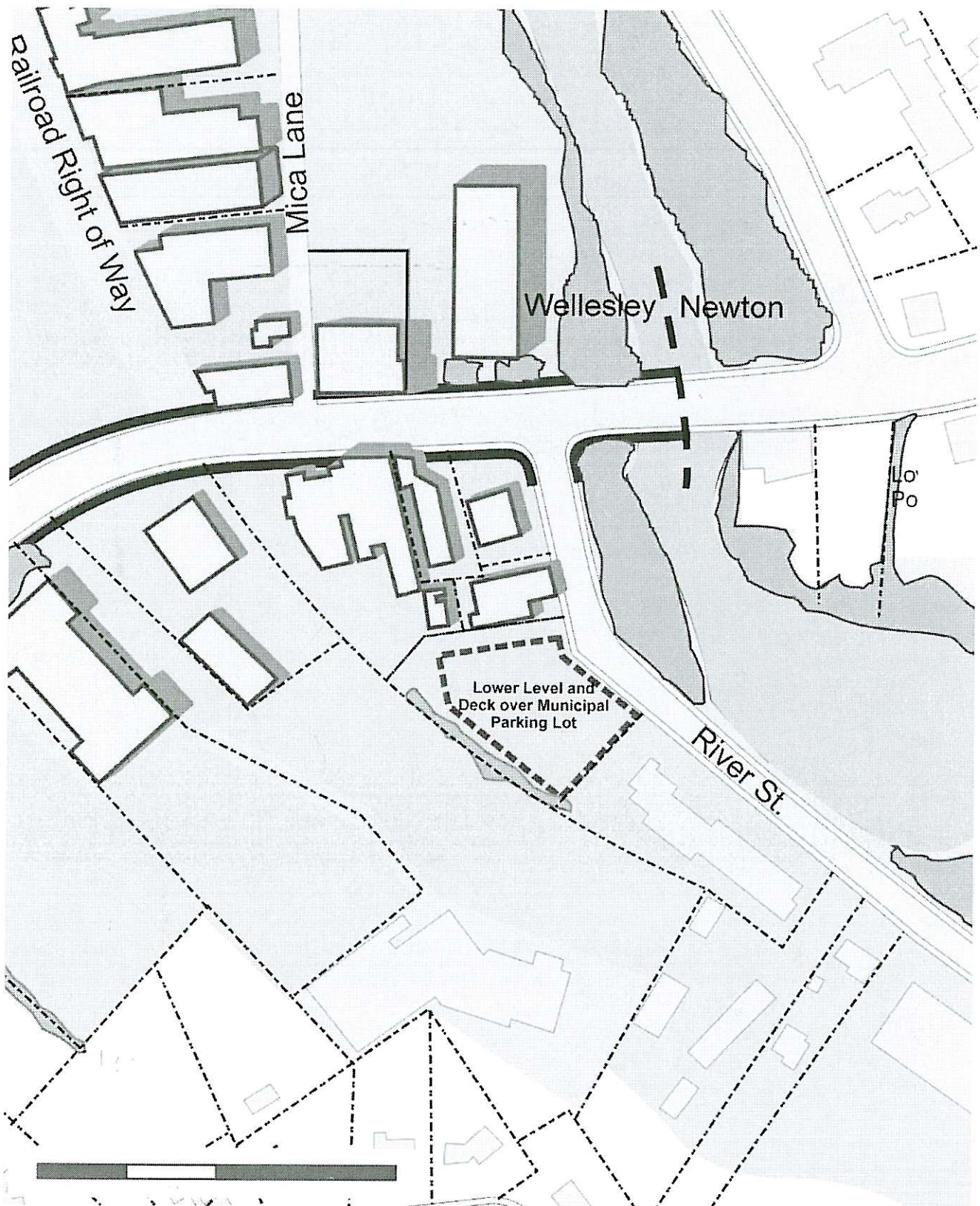
### **Option 1: Municipal Garage on River Street**

The first possibility for increasing municipal parking presents itself at the current municipal parking lot on River Street. The Town already owns the site, and the idea of decking over the parking lot has surfaced numerous times in public meetings and discussions. Since foundations would have to be built to add a deck to the existing site, we show an option that builds a lower level as well.

### **Circulation**

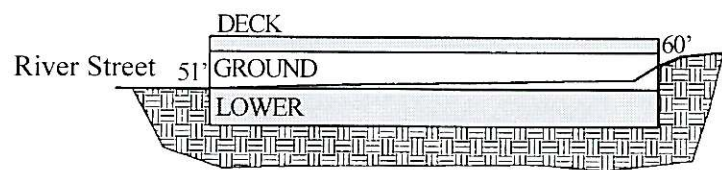
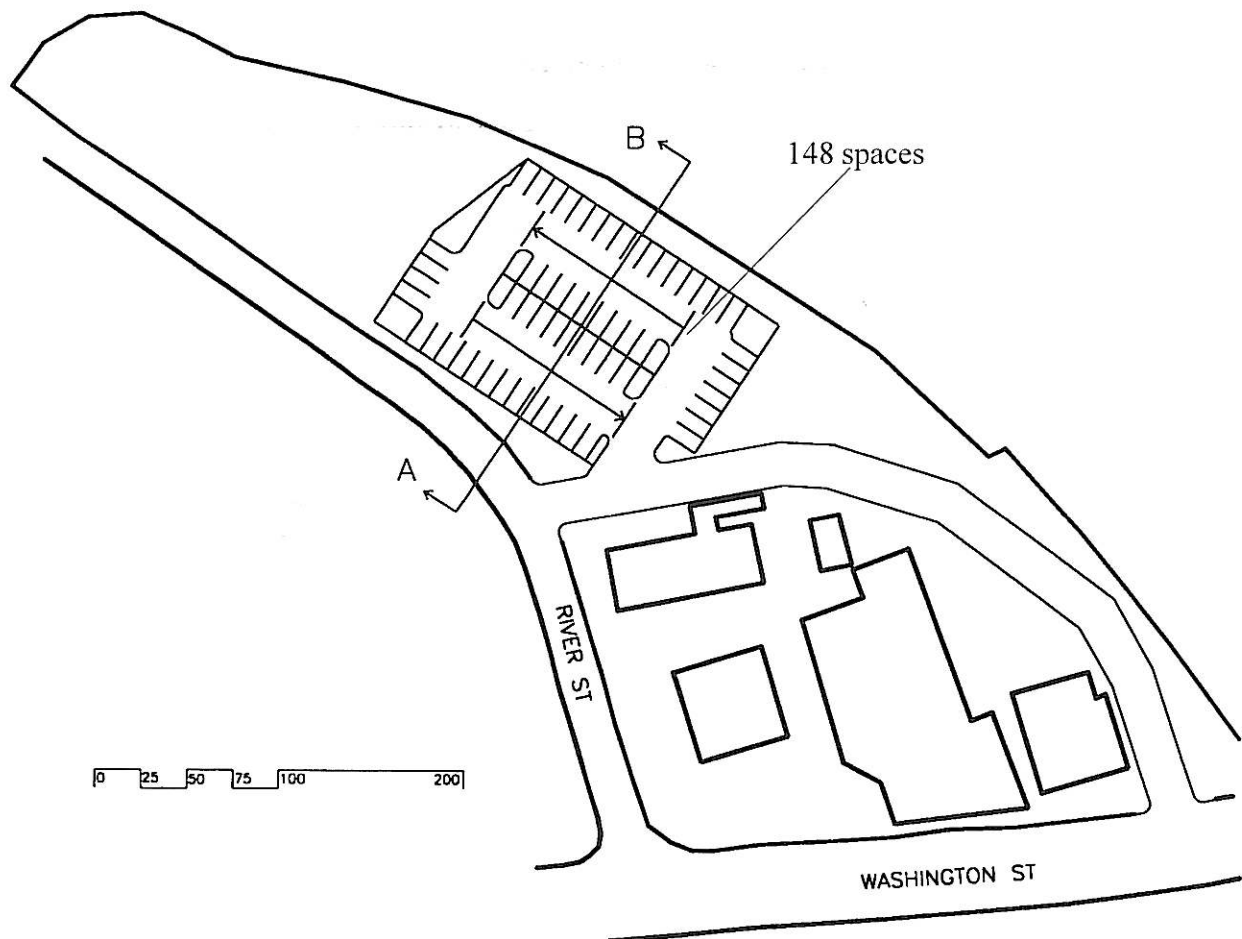
To keep the existing pattern of vehicular access between Washington Street and River Street through the municipal lot, the garage is set back from the adjoining property on River Street by a width sufficient for a public way and buffer landscaping. This access road would service the exit needs of Papparazzi's parking lot, as well as the quick pick-up and drop-off needs of Mark's Sandwich Shop. The entrance and exit of the municipal parking garage would be located on this access road, to provide queuing between the garage and River Street.





## Municipal Parking Garage - Option 1





Section A-B

## Municipal Parking Garage - Option 1 On River Street

## Capacity

Using a standard, efficient layout of split-level garage with double-loaded ramps between levels, the three-level parking garage, adapted to the shape of the lot, would yield 148 spaces. Subtracting the existing 63 spaces of the municipal lot, the net increase in parking is 85 spaces. Because of the 9' difference in elevation between River Street and the parking areas behind the municipal lot, the three level garage (Lower, Ground, and open roof Deck) would have a height of 1 ½ stories on River Street, and a height of 6' above the current parking lots at the rear.

An additional level of parking would yield another 58 spaces, for a total of 206 spaces and a net increase of 143 spaces, but the siting of the garage at street edge precludes this option from an urban design perspective. Although a height of 2 ½ stories would comply with the height limit of 36' under the proposed Lower Falls Commercial zoning district, it would cast shadow on the outdoor terrace of the adjoining Riverview Café in the morning, and the increased car traffic to and from the garage would negatively impact this retail use. A height of 1 ½ stories would be less detrimental to this neighbor along River Street, overlooking a riverfront park, and would be easier to treat architecturally and with landscaping.

## Disadvantages

A municipal parking garage would not be the best use of this site on River Street. With views of the Charles River and riverfront park across the street, next to a restaurant on one side and residential uses on the other, the site would be best redeveloped as retail property. In addition, the treatment of the facade along River Street and of the corner of River Street and the public access way would need greater design attention, and would cost more, than a garage of identical capacity hidden from the street.

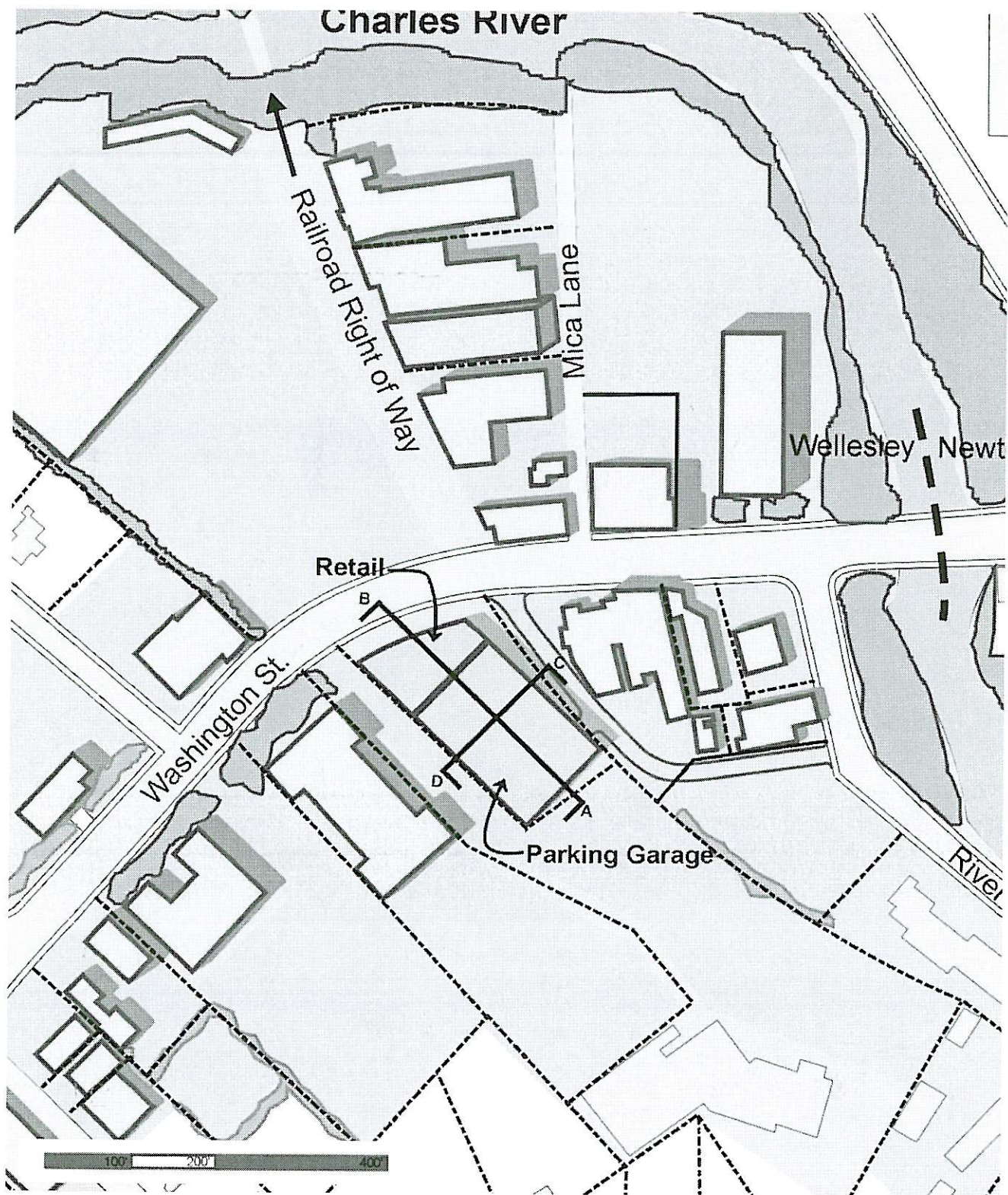
For these reasons, we explored another approach to increasing the supply of municipal parking in Lower Falls. Both of the following options rest on the possibility of a land swap between the River Street lot owned by the Town and the owner of another site who would then be able to develop the River Street property either for retail or for small-scale office uses. This proposal would release an interior site, already used as surface parking, to be more fully developed into structured parking, while allowing the River Street site to take advantage of its riverfront location. For this land swap to be attractive to a property owner, a feasibility study should be conducted to determine the development potential of the River Street site under the uses, height, and siting requirements of the proposed Lower Falls Commercial zoning district.

We wish to note that the property owners of the sites on which the parking garage options are shown, are neither interested in exchanging land with the Town nor in developing retail uses on the River Street site. One owner and manager of office buildings wants to retain the views of the Charles River across the municipal lot as amenities to the tenants of the office park set back and above Washington and River Streets. These options therefore are shown only to illustrate how a parking garage of given dimensions and capacity would fit into the existing land area and topography of Lower Falls.

## Option 2: Campbell Property

This option shows a 4-level parking garage sited on the Campbell property, on which is currently located Taylor's Rental. A 2-story building fronts the garage on Washington Street: retail on the first level, office above. This front building both visually screens the structured parking and provides a continuous streetwall along Washington Street. This location, conveniently at the center of Lower Falls, offers the best site for a municipal garage.

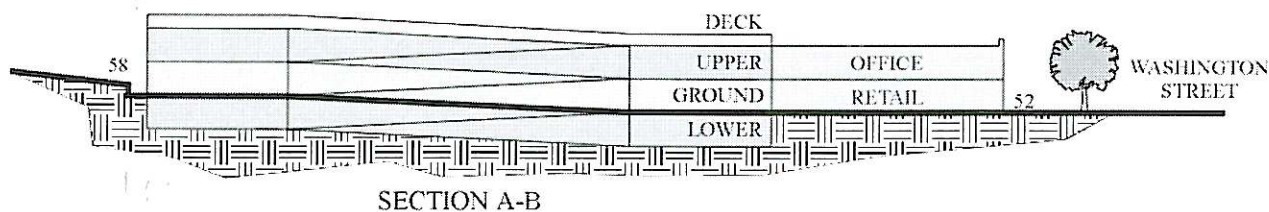
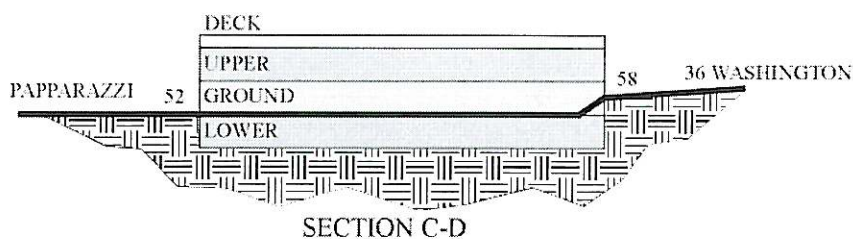
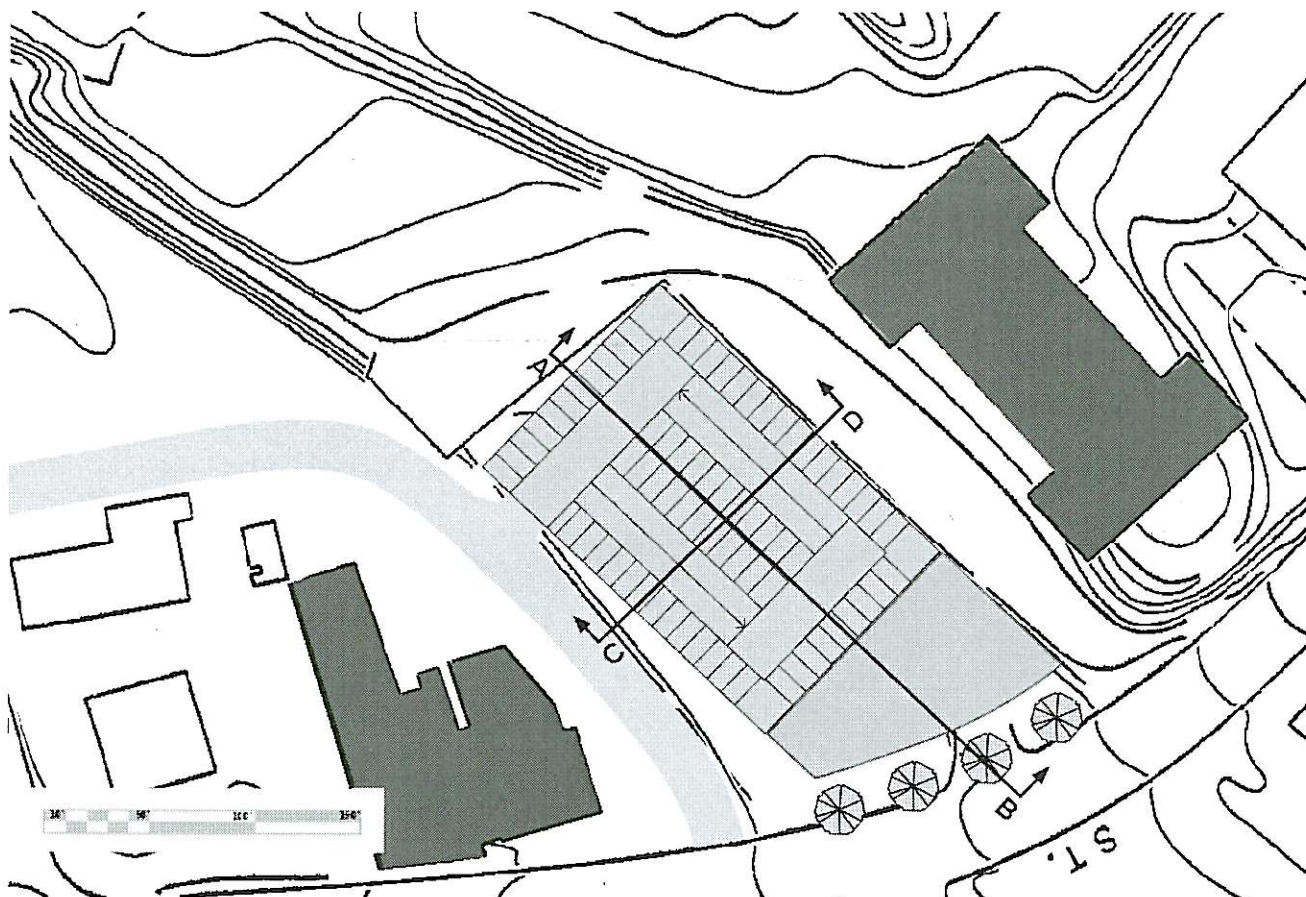




## Municipal Parking Garage - Option 2 Campbell Property

*Note: The owners of the private properties shown as location options for a parking garage are neither considering building such a garage nor exchanging land with the Town. These sites are for illustrative purposes only, to test the feasibility and scale of a structured parking facility in Lower Falls.*





## Municipal Parking Garage - Option 2 Campbell Property

*Note: The owners of the private properties shown as location options for a parking garage are neither considering building such a garage nor exchanging land with the Town. These sites are for illustrative purposes only, to test the feasibility and scale of a structured parking facility in Lower Falls.*



## **Circulation**

By keeping a right-of way through the existing municipal lot, the garage is served by a one-way loop from Washington Street to River Street. This access reduces the traffic back-ups caused by restaurant and sandwich shop customers exiting onto Washington Street, and preserves the existing circulation pattern of a loop around the corner buildings of Washington and River Streets.

## **Capacity**

Using the same layout of a split-level garage with double-loaded ramps between levels as in Option 1, but with a full rectangular shape, the parking garage would have an interior footprint of 120' x 184' and four levels: Lower (below ground), Ground (at grade at entrance), Upper (one level above ground) and Deck (open roof deck). The total capacity is of 252 parking spaces. Subtracting the municipal parking (63 spaces) which it would replace, and the existing parking on the Campbell property (32 spaces), the net increase is of 157 parking spaces.

This garage represents a significant increase in the municipal parking supply of Lower Falls. It would almost fill the current deficit of 165 off-street parking spaces required under existing zoning to meet the retail and office needs of the Mica Lane properties, including 5 and 15 Washington Street. The new retail and office uses of the front building would require additional parking but, as with most small-scale buildings of the center, would benefit from the proximity of the parking garage by having customers park once to go to several destinations.

## **Siting**

The Campbell property being relatively flat, the visual impact of the garage would not be reduced by topography. Instead, the structure would be screened by the retail and office building fronting Washington Street.

## **Option 3: Haynes Property**

This option shows the same building footprint, number of levels, and parking capacity as the garage of Option 2 but is located just behind it in the parking lot of the office park owned by Haynes Properties. While this location is not as close to the center of Lower Falls as the preceding option, the topography of the site makes it ideal for a multi-level garage. This site was mentioned at public meetings as a favored location.

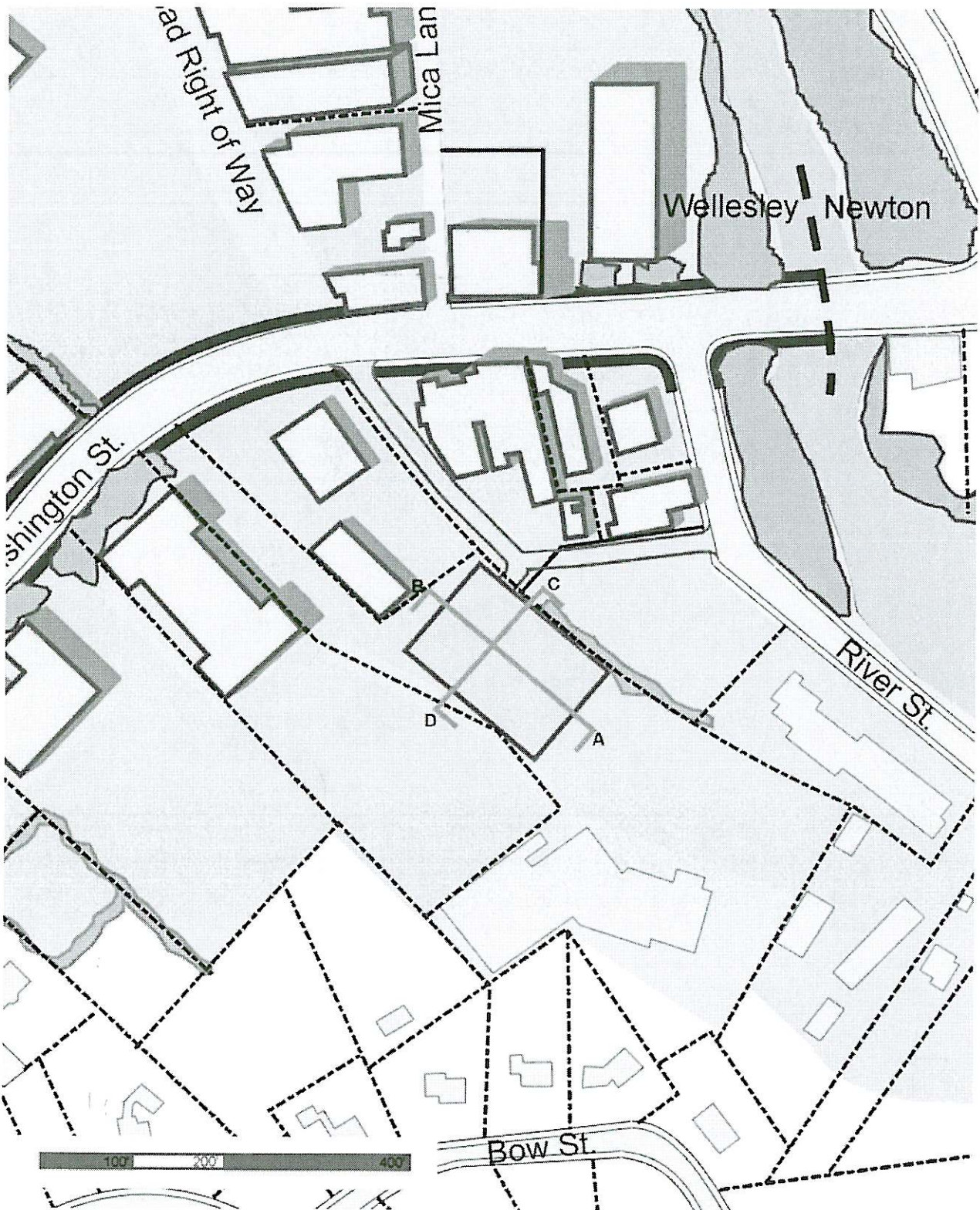
## **Circulation**

This option offers the same circulation benefits as Option 2 (access from Washington Street, exit onto River Street) with slightly better queuing capacity, being set back further from Washington Street.

## **Capacity**

The garage has a total capacity of 252 spaces. Subtracting the municipal lot (63 spaces) and the estimated surface parking currently on this portion of the Haynes property (68 spaces), to which the roof deck would be dedicated, this option yields a net increase of 121 spaces.

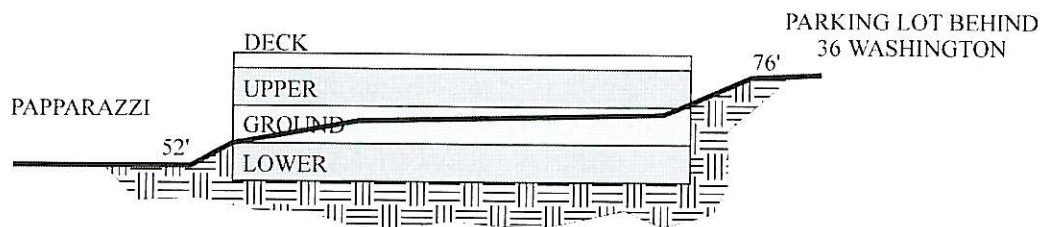
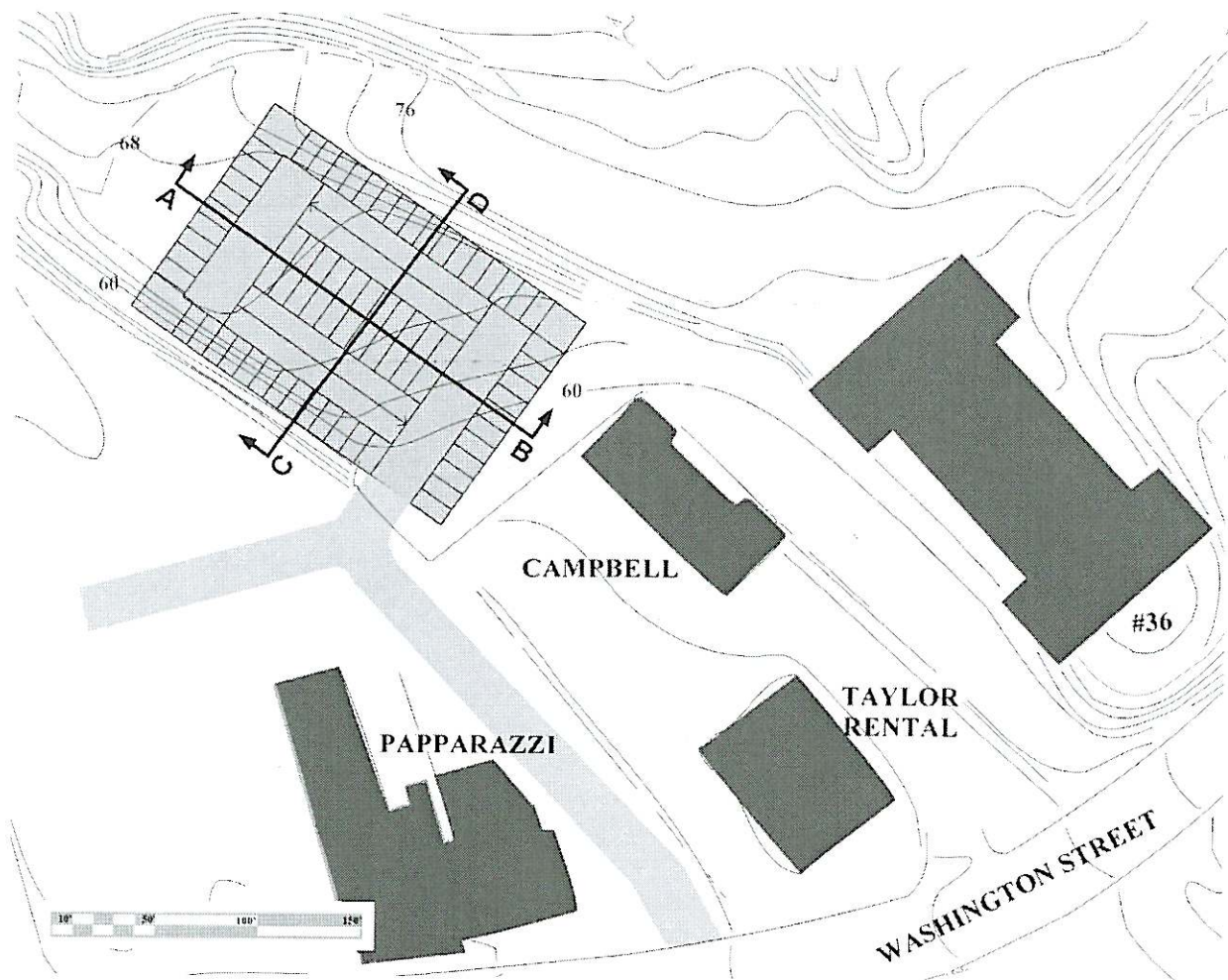




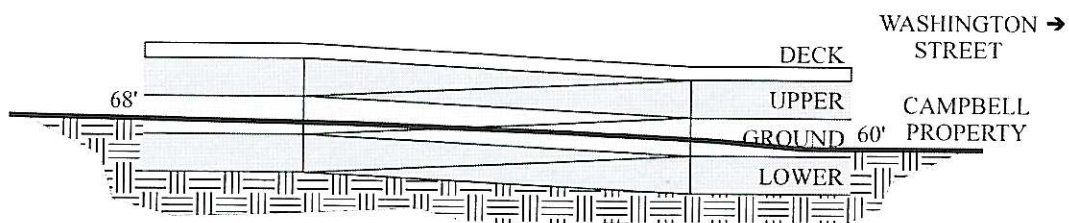
## Municipal Parking Garage - Option 3 Haynes Property

*Note: The owners of the private properties shown as location options for a parking garage are neither considering building such a garage nor exchanging land with the Town. These sites are for illustrative purposes only, to test the feasibility and scale of a structured parking facility in Lower Falls.*

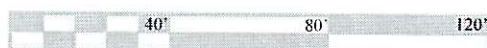




SECTION C-D



SECTION A-B



*Note: The owners of the private properties shown as location options for a parking garage are neither considering building such a garage nor exchanging land with the Town. These sites are for illustrative purposes only, to test the feasibility and scale of a structured parking facility in Lower Falls.*

## Municipal Parking Garage - Option 3 Haynes Property

## **Siting**

The topography of this site is its greatest advantage. A rise of 8' in grade levels from front to back (Section A-B) and of 24' from side to side (Section C-D) offers the possibility of inserting the structured parking into existing slopes, with reduced visual and functional impacts on surrounding properties.

## **Alternatives**

Another parking garage location which is not illustrated and has been discussed at public meetings, is on the north side of Washington Street, at One Washington Street. This is still a possibility, contingent on an interest on the part of the owners in a land swap with the River Street municipal lot. But it was felt that the visual impact of a parking structure on this flat site, adjoining and slightly sloping towards the Charles River, would be more difficult to mitigate than in the rising topography of the sites south of Washington Street. If a pedestrian path is eventually negotiated and built along the edge of this critical site cradled by a bend in the river, the back and side of a parking garage would be highly visible to prospective users of this riverfront link in a network of paths. It would diminish the quality of experience of one of the most highly praised assets of Lower Falls.



Text of the Zoning Amendments

**AMENDMENT 1**

*Proposed to a vote of the Wellesley Town Meeting: to adopt a new commercial zoning district called Lower Falls Commercial.*

- 1) Amend SECTION I ESTABLISHMENT OF DISTRICTS by a new item as follows: 14) Lower Falls Village Commercial District (SECTION IXB); and renumber the following items as necessary.*
- 2) Add a new section to the Wellesley Zoning Bylaw, Section IXB Lower Falls Village Commercial District as follows:*

**SECTION IXB. LOWER FALLS VILLAGE COMMERCIAL DISTRICT**

- A. Purpose: To establish a commercial zoning district for Lower Falls that allows for commercial reinvestment and improvements, while protecting the quality of the immediately surrounding residential neighborhoods.
- B. In the Lower Falls Village Commercial, no new building or structure shall be constructed or used, in whole or in part, and no building or structure, or part thereof, shall be altered, enlarge, reconstructed or used, and no land shall be used, for any purpose except one or more of the following specified uses.
  1. Hotel or inn;
  2. Restaurant, cafe, outside dining areas, or other eating place for the sale of any food or beverage for consumption on or off the lot; drive through windows where food or beverage is purchased by customers in vehicles not allowed.
  3. Retail stores having less than 10,000 square feet of floor area where all items for sale rent are kept inside a building; including artisan shops for the creation of pottery, jewelry, clothing, sculpture, and similar artistic and craft activities.
  4. Theatre, hall, club or other place of assembly;
  5. Office, bank or other monetary institution; drive through windows where transactions are made by customers in vehicles are not allowed except by special permit under clause 13 hereof;
  6. Public or semi-public building;
  7. Such accessory uses as are customary in connection with any of the uses enumerated in clauses 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and are incidental thereto; such as the temporary parking of motor vehicles of customers and clients patronizing a use allowed in the district; drive through windows where business is conducted from vehicles shall not be considered as customary accessory use;
  8. Any additional use for which a special permit may be obtained in a specific case, as hereinafter provided in Section XXV after the determination by the Special Permit Granting Authority that the proposed uses is similar to one or more of the uses specifically authorized by this section.

9. Any of the following uses upon granting of a special permit as provided in Section XXV.
  - a. Sale or rental of tools and/or equipment involving outdoor storage.
  - b. Retail store having 10,000 or more square feet of floor area.

C. SITE PLAN APPROVAL

The provision of SECTION XVI A. SITE PLAN APPROVAL shall apply.

D. OFF-STREET PARKING

Off-street parking shall be required at 3.2 spaces per 1000 gross square feet of commercial area. However, if any portion of a parcel zoned Lower Falls Commercial is within 500 feet of any portion of a public parking lot or lots that have individually or jointly more than 50 parking spaces, off-street parking shall be required at 2.5 spaces per 1,000 gross square feet of commercial area, excluding uninhabitable basement areas. Further, the first 4,000 square feet of upper story commercial space shall be exempt from off-street parking requirements. One off-street parking space per 500 gross square feet of building area shall be required of all upper story space in excess of 4,000 sq. ft.

- E. FLOOR AREA RATIO: The maximum floor area ratio, permitted as of right, shall be 0.3. For any use listed in Section B, above, the Planning Board may grant a special permit up to 1.00.

- 3) Amend SECTION XVIII AREA REGULATIONS as follows: add the term Lower Falls Commercial after the word Educational, in line 1 of SECTION XVIII subsection C paragraph 2.

- 4) Amend SECTION XIX YARD REGULATIONS

Add a double asterisk (\*\*) in Table 1 for all entries associated with the term minimum front yard setback (street setback). Further after the current explanation of the single asterisk at the end of Table 1 in Section XIX add the following:

\*\*All lots in the Lower Falls Commercial District the front yard setback shall be a maximum of 10 feet but not less than 5 feet.

- 5) Amend SECTION XXI OFF-STREET PARKING

Amend subpart 2, the Table of Off-Street parking requirements by inserting the term Lower Falls Commercial\*\*\*\* under the column Zoning District for the following use categories.

- Hotel, inn, lodging house, restaurant or other eating place.
- Building used for administrative, clerical, statistical and professional offices and other similar uses.
- Hotel, motel, inn, restaurant operated in conjunction with such similar uses.
- Any building used for any business, industrial, educational or commercial purpose but not including residential uses accessory to an education use.
- Any building used for any business, industrial, education or commercial purpose.

Further, add the following explanation for \*\*\*\* after the current \*\*\* at the end of the TABLE OF OFF STREET PARKING REQUIREMENTS. Before Subpart 3:

\*\*\*\* Off-street parking shall be required at 3.2 spaces per 1000 gross square feet of commercial area. However, if any portion of a parcel zoned Lower Falls Commercial is within 500 feet of any portion of a public parking lot or lots that have individually or jointly more than 50 parking spaces, off street parking shall be required at 2.5 spaces per 1,000 gross square feet of commercial area,



excluding uninhabitable basement areas. Further, the first 4,000 square feet of upper story commercial space shall be exempt from off street parking requirements. One off street parking space per 500 gross square feet of building area shall be required of all upper story space in excess of 4,000 sq. ft.

- 6) Amend SECTION XXIIA. SIGNS AND IDENTIFICATION DEVICES, by adding the term Lower Falls Commercial after the term Business A in subsection D. SIGN REGULATIONS under COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS.
- 7) Amend SECTION XX, HEIGHTS OF BUILDINGS OR STRUCTURES, by adding the following sentence to the end of the second paragraph. Further, that in the Lower Falls Commercial District the maximum height shall be 36 feet but not more than 2 stories.

## AMENDMENT 2

- 1) AMEND SECTION I. ESTABLISHMENT OF DISTRICTS *by adding a new item as follows:*  
24. Residential Incentive Overlay (RIO) District (Section XIV).  
*(if the Lower Falls Commercial District has been adopted and inserted in this section as item 14., the Residential Incentive Overlay (RIO) District will be item 25.)*
- 2) Add a new section to the Wellesley Zoning Bylaw, SECTION XIV F RESIDENTIAL INCENTIVE OVERLAY (RIO) as follows:
  - A. Purpose: To provide a residential reuse incentive for parcels zoned commercial or industrial where one or more of the following conditions apply:
    - a) general site conditions and access constraints impede long term successful commercial or industrial use;
    - b) the parcels that border the residential districts and their residential reuse would extend and complement the character and function of the existing surrounding neighborhood;
    - c) the parcels border unique natural features, open space, or historic resources which would better be preserved and enjoyed by the public over the long term through residential rather than commercial or industrial uses.
  - B. Applicability: The RIO shall be considered as overlapping other zoning districts. Specifically the RIO may be applied over any Business, Business A, Industrial, Industrial A and Lower Falls Commercial District.
  - C. Underlying Zoning Districts: The RIO confers additional development options to be employed at the discretion of the property owner. The RIO does not in any manner remove or alter the zoning rights permitted by the underlying zoning district. However, if a property owner selects to use the additional development options permitted by the RIO, the following use and dimensional criteria shall apply.
  - D. Permitted Uses
    1. Assisted Elderly Living, Independent Elderly Housing or a combination of both.
      - a) Associated Dimensional Requirements
        - minimum lot size: 2 acres for new construction  
25,000 sq. ft. for building reuse
        - density: 30 units per acre; maximum of 150 per project
        - height: 4 stories and 45 feet (see section XX)
        - off-street parking: 0.65 spaces per 1,00 SF of building area,  
excluding uninhabitable basement areas
        - setbacks:
          - front yard 25 feet
          - side yard 40 feet
          - rear yard 40 feet



material and/or an earthen berm shall be installed to provide screening on a year-round basis.

- b) Site Plan Approval: Subject to the requirements of SECTION XVI A. In instances where an existing building is proposed for reuse in accordance with the RIO, the parking criteria shall apply. However, all other dimensional and site requirements, not noted above, shall be established as part of the site plan approval process, but in no instance shall the building be expanded to exceed the height limitation or the current height of the building if said height is greater than 45 feet.

## 2. Conventional Multi-Family Requirements

### a) Associated Dimensional Requirements

- minimum lot size: 2 acres for new development  
25,000 sq. ft. for building reuse
- density: 15 dwelling units per acre
- height: 4 stories and 45 feet (see section XX)
- off-street parking: 2 spaces per dwelling unit
- setbacks:
  - front yard 25 feet
  - side yard 40 feet
  - rear yard 40 feet

Where the elderly housing abuts a residential zoning district, the setback shall be 60 feet and a buffer of natural material and/or an earthen berm shall be installed to provide screening on a year-round basis.

- b) Site Plan Approval: Subject to the requirements of Section XVI A. In instances where an existing building is proposed for reuse in accordance with the RIO, the parking criteria shall apply. However, all other dimensional requirement shall be established as part of the site plan approval process, but in no instance shall the building be expanded to exceed the height limitation or the current height of the building if said height is greater than 45 feet.

3. Mixed-Use Projects. In RIO projects that provide at least 100 elderly dwelling units, up to 10,000 sq. ft. of retail space in separate structures shall be permitted if the parking requirements for both the elderly housing and commercial use are provided on site. Further, for mixed-use projects, the location of the commercial use and the related off-street parking shall be determined as part of the site plan approval process.

### AMENDMENT 3

*Add the following definitions to SECTION IA.*

Independent Elderly Housing: A building or group of buildings containing dwellings where the occupancy of the dwellings is restricted to persons 62 years of age or older or couples where either the husband or wife is 62 years of age or older. Independent elderly housing may include support services such as central dining, cleaning, linen, laundry and other personal support services. Further they may provide convenience retail services if said facilities do not have any exterior signs and comprise not more than 2% of the total floor area of the development. Independent Elderly Housing may include a medical service station for a house physician but not on site convalescent or nursing facilities. However, this definition shall not prevent independent elderly housing units from being developed as a distinct element in a larger development that includes assisted elderly housing units if said units are on separate floors or separate buildings.

Assisted Elderly Housing: A building or group of buildings that have on site medical, convalescent and nursing facilities for the residents but in all other manners is consistent with the definition and uses permitted for independent elderly housing projects.

### Amendment 4

Amendment to SECTION XX HEIGHT OF BUILDINGS OR STRUCTURES

*Amend SECTION XX HEIGHTS OF BUILDINGS OR STRUCTURES by inserting the following sentence after the first paragraph.* Except, that for structures or buildings developed by the Residential Incentive Overlay the total number of stories permitted shall be 4, and the maximum height shall not exceed 45 feet.



